ANDY ROBERTSON • ALISSON & ADRIAN • CLARKSON & CAIN • JASON McATEER • LFC LEGENDS





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Commercial Director Will Beedles Executive Art Editor Rick Cooke Executive Editor Paul Dove Marketing & Communications Manager Claire Brown
Printed by William Gibbons Email liverpoolfcmag@reachsport.com. To subscribe call 0845 143 0001 or visit www.reachsportshop.com

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE
LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB
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EYES ON ALISSON

Liverpool's record-setting shot-stopper goes through his final pre-match moments as the Spion Kop roars out another anthem at Anfield. What is it about those red, white and yellow flags and banners, contrasted against that smooth, almost fluorescent green playing surface, that sets the heart racing so much? Special place, exceptional times. Just savour it.


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KLOPP WATCH

The boss checks the time during a first-team training session at Melwood. From next season, all being well, he'll be doing it at the club's new world-class training complex in Kirkby where there will be three pitches measuring approximately 32,000sq metres, with dedicated goalkeeping and warm-up areas separating two of the playing surfaces.



LFC
AXA



THE A TEAM

Alisson and Adrian have been important figures between the sticks for Liverpool FC this season. Here they talk about the art of goalkeeping, pushing each other on and their mutual respect



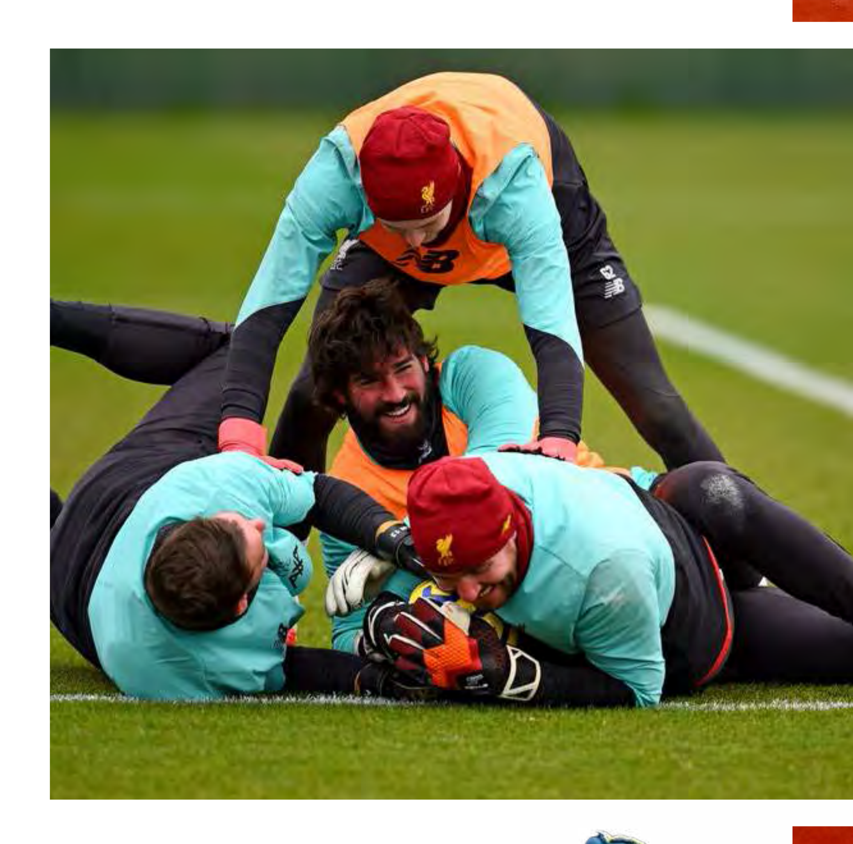
Alisson, let's talk Premier League: 57 games, 31 clean-sheets and only one defeat; 30 goals conceded at just over one every two games. What most impresses you about these stats and how happy are you since you came to Liverpool?
ALISSON: We don't really look at the numbers, although obviously they are important in football. The important number is the one that wins you the title, the number of points we end up with. That's most important. Having said that, I'm really happy to be achieving so many records here at the club, a place that has received me so well. I was so pleased with my welcome. I'm really happy to be representing Liverpool, such a passionate club with players all playing at the same intensity and rhythm. As you said, we're breaking records, but the most important thing is that we are on the right path to winning the title which is our most important objective. We also have a chance in the Champions League. That is also within the club's aims.

Adrian, within a couple of weeks of arriving at Liverpool you won your first trophy as a professional when you helped the team to the European Super Cup. Looking back at it now, how difficult was it to come almost straight in to the team?
ADRIAN: From my point-of-view it was a good deal as my contract with West Ham finished last season and I took the decision to move on to leave happy and enjoying my football. It was an atypical summer as I had to train by myself, with friends and the goalkeeping coach over in Seville. At the beginning of August the call came from Liverpool, and we agreed the contract very quickly and I had to make my way here hurriedly as the season was about to start. I obviously didn't expect Ali to suffer the misfortune of an injury in the first game. So I had to step up to a new challenge at my new club and gain the confidence of everybody again. I was more than prepared for this. After playing so many games previously in the Premier League it was nothing new other than playing for another team in a different stadium. And thankfully the dynamic was really good. It was very easy to fit in with such an excellent team dynamic with the team showing such high standards as they are right now.

Alisson, we've often seen you trying to occupy as much space as possible when you are trying to make saves when faced by an attacker?
It's a characteristic of my game in one-on-one situations. I like to close down the space. I've always worked on this to close down as much space as possible, to gain some time to narrow the angle of the striker's shot and to leave my hands in a position which allows me to react with my arms if the ball is taken out of my immediate radius of action.

Adrian, you also made an important save in a one-on-one situation from Tammy Abraham in the game against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge earlier in the season?
In a one-on-one situation I believe that the keeper has to make themselves big and as Ali was quite rightly saying, when the player puts their head down to strike the ball, it's the moment to close them down and narrow the angle for a shot and cover as much of the goal as possible. We need to force the player to decide, whilst not giving them an easy decision to make. And the other thing to add is that ultimately being in a good position with your feet and your arms slightly open and legs blocking the goal makes it more difficult for the striker to score.

We've also seen both of you make amazing reaction saves. How do you do that when you have barely any time to react?
ALISSON: Those are completely different types of save. They are saves where I'm reacting to the ball. I'm not moving as I need to be balanced with both feet on the ground to make the save and react in the best way possible. When the ball isn't too far outside of my radius of action, I only need to be well positioned to be able to react quickly and make the save.



THE IMPORTANT NUMBER IS THE ONE THAT WINS YOU THE TITLE, THE NUMBER OF POINTS WE END UP WITH. THAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

ADRIAN: Like Ali said, it's one of the most difficult things, maintaining a good position when faced with a shot that comes at you quickly. With crosses, if you can help by coming out to punch or block the ball, that's great. But if you can't do that, you have to get back in position and stay on your line but remain in a position where you can still dive. Like Ali also said, with your two feet on the ground at the moment you need to react and then your arms just do their job. Of course, if the ball isn't too far away from me I will be able to stick out a hand and hopefully make more of a reaction save. Of course, even when we are reacting quickly, you can still see out of the corner of your eye whether an opposition striker is coming in. In that situation, if we turn the ball away weakly with soft hands or leave it in our immediate area because it may be a difficult save to make, the oncoming attackers can take a touch and then score. In these situations, I try to save it with the strongest wrists possible to knock it away from the danger area. But the key here for us is to be in the right position. Good positioning for us goalkeepers is the most important thing to have.


L.F.C.
AXA

Alisson, your assist for Mo Salah's goal against Manchester United at Anfield is already famous! Is this something you work on in training?
Yes we do this in training, although it's not something we talk about regularly. We spend so much time training and the long kick out of my hands is something I practise a lot and have done throughout my career. It's something he [Salah] is aware of. He knows that I have this ability and I talk to him about it as well. This long kick depends a lot more on the attacking player's run than my kick. Obviously I have to have the ability to make such a pass, the way I did it. Adri also does it playing out quickly, he uses the same technique. Salah's run was the most important factor. I just had to see his run, play the ball in his direction and take a bit of weight off the ball as [David] De Gea was off his line. But this definitely comes from training – it's not an accident or just a hit and hope clearance forward.

The fans enjoyed your reaction?
It was great. I was caught up in the moment. I usually celebrate our goals on my own, though I saw that we were in the final seconds of the game. It was an important goal for Mo, his first against United, and a goal in a derby with my assist. So I decided to run over there and celebrate with everyone. I was calling everyone over to join me though they were all exhausted, really tired whereas I still had the legs for it!



WE SPEND SO MUCH TIME TRAINING AND THE LONG KICK OUT OF MY HANDS IS SOMETHING I PRACTISE A LOT AND HAVE DONE THROUGHOUT MY CAREER




LFC
AXA
ERIC
ADRIAN
1
13

Let's talk about an unhappy memory for Alisson. After the game against Brighton, Jürgen Klopp said you are in the exact position where you are supposed to be and that nine times out of ten you clear the ball, but one out of ten you handle it outside the area and are sent off.

Yes in my own words, when something like this happens we ask questions of ourselves. Was I in the right position? But I tend to play further up the field outside of the area to support my team-mates. The through ball was perfect with the weight coming off it as it came down, so it didn't gain momentum when it bounced. In fact the opposite happened and it sat up a little. I was already in what we goalkeepers call 'no man's land' and I tried to block the ball but it was a bit to one side and that was my reaction as we've been talking about here. If you play a ball by me, I am going to stick my hand out because my reactions are goalkeeper reactions. I handled the ball and was sent off. As Klopp said, these things happen. I'll save ten balls in a one-on-one with the attacker and every once in a while this will happen though I'll work towards it not happening again.

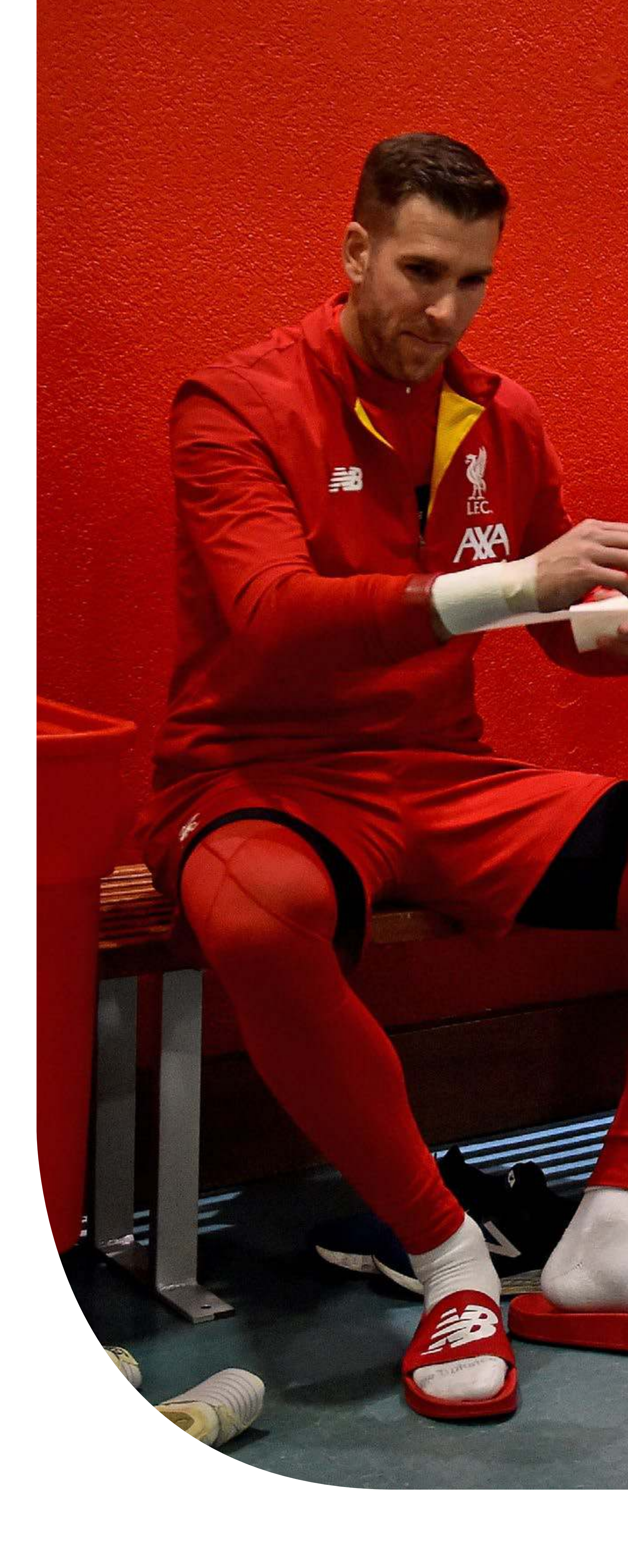
Then when you came on, Adrian, Brighton scored from the free-kick while you were lining up the wall...

To be totally honest with you I still cannot understand it, because it's the first time I've seen anything like it in my professional career - that a referee signals to take the kick when neither the wall nor the goalkeeper are in position. It was difficult too for me, as I was coming into the game on a cold early evening and I hadn't warmed up. I had to get going by organising the wall for a dangerous free-kick just outside the box. The referee decided at that moment to blow for the kick to be taken, giving them the advantage, when I wasn't ready. At the end of the day we have to accept it, it was the ref's decision. I was happy in the end because we won the game, but it could well have cost us a couple of points.

What characteristics impresses you about the other as a keeper?

ADRIAN: I'd say that Ali is a very complete goalkeeper. Keepers have to be excellent in many different aspects of the game. He is very good with his feet and he has that calmness that goalkeepers need. He's physically strong and powerful, he's quick, he re-adjusts and gets back in position really well and the bottom line is our defence helps us whenever we're playing. He's also been supported. On a personal level, he's a top guy, and of course when we play with our defence in front of us, that helps us greatly too.

ALISSON: As Adri said, together with the ability he has as a goalkeeper, he's been playing in the Premier League for almost a decade, and no-one gets to play that long in the Premier League for nothing. So he has the qualities in all the aspects a goalkeeper requires. He's very good with the ball at his feet and has improved further being here as it's something this team demands. But his main quality for me is his solidity and confidence. When you think about the circumstances, he came into the team at a very difficult moment. We were a settled side and I got injured, so it was a challenging scenario. I imagine he didn't think he would be coming on that soon and he put in great performances which demonstrates the confidence he has in his ability. With his contributions on the pitch he's demonstrated the things that come naturally to us – very good positioning which is fundamental for a goalkeeper. And, like me, he's someone who likes to put the work in. His arrival has added a lot to our team.




I'D SAY THAT ALI IS A VERY COMPLETE GOALKEEPER. HE IS VERY GOOD WITH HIS FEET AND HE HAS THAT CALMNESS THAT GOALKEEPERS NEED
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SECOND SIGHT

The public consultation on the Anfield Road expansion has entered a second phase with new visualisations unveiled



An expanded Anfield Road stand has felt like a natural progression at the home of Liverpool FC ever since the world-class upgrade to the Main Stand was completed. But these things, quite rightly, take time.

With the start of a second-stage public consultation, local residents, representatives, businesses and supporters have been invited to review the club's updated plans, which have been reshaped based on the feedback received in the initial stage of public consultation held in December last year.

During the first stage more than 800 responses were received. The majority of the feedback was positive and supportive of the club's vision, along with some constructive feedback from local residents on the impact of the proposed closure of a section of Anfield Road.

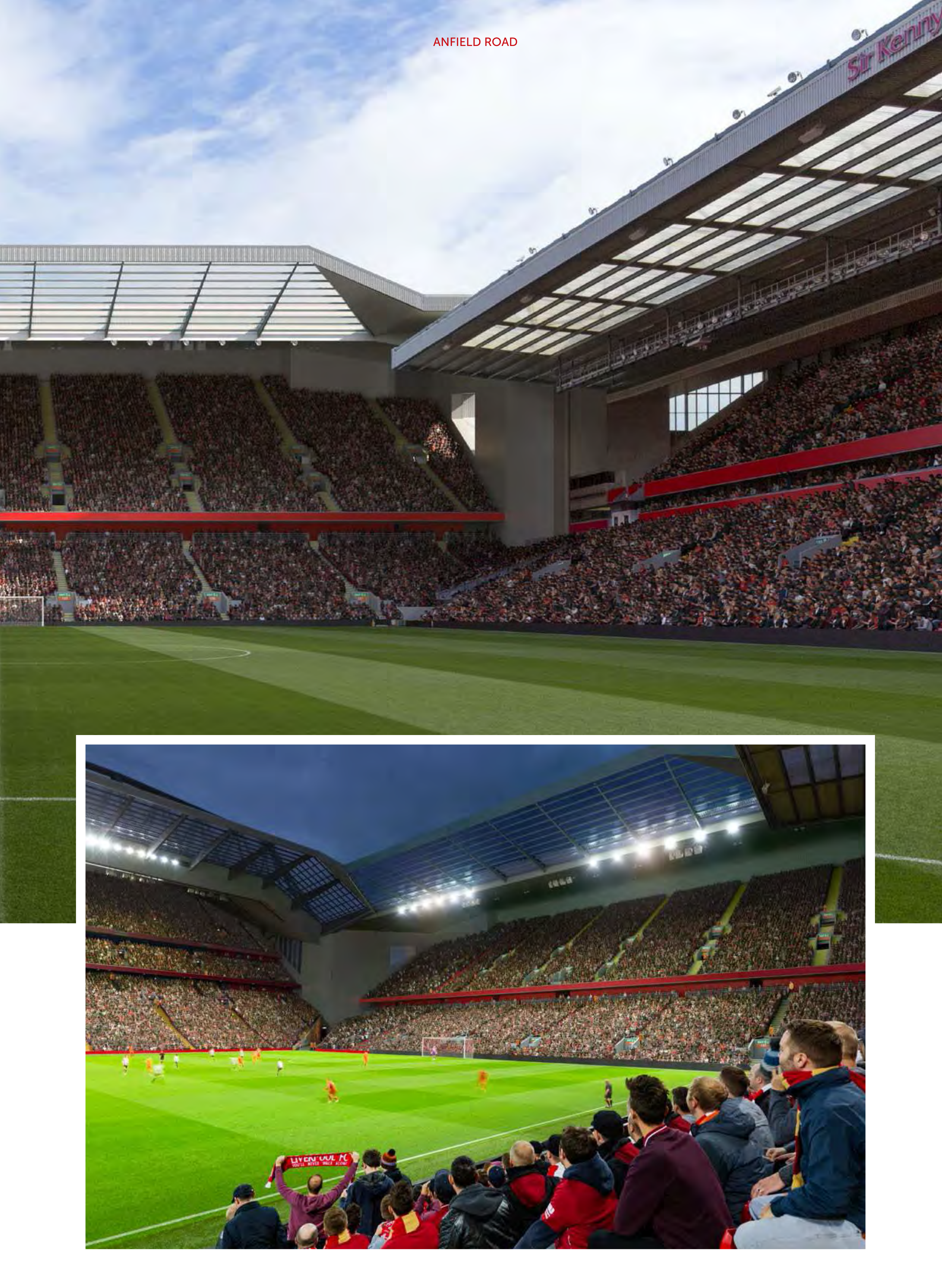
Based on this feedback, the second-stage plans now see Anfield Road realigned around the footprint of the proposed expanded stand, demonstrating the importance of the public-consultation process and the club's commitment to the local community.

The club has also progressed discussions on the design and configuration of the proposed refurbished stand. An outline of the number of general admission seats within the stand would be 5,200, with around 1,800 lounge/sports bar-style hospitality.

Andy Hughes, the club's chief operating officer at Liverpool FC, says: "The feedback of our local residents has been essential to the planning process of this proposed expansion.

"We have been very clear from the start that we will only proceed with this project if we have their co-operation, we have a financial model which offers economic stability and we can navigate the complex planning landscape.

"These updated plans reflect that we have listened and we thank all of those people who took the time to share their views with us in the initial stage of this process and look forward to more thoughts on the updates we have made."


Sir Kenny

The second stage of public consultation has seen three public drop-in events take place at Anfield throughout February, providing residents, businesses and fans a further opportunity to see the updated plans, ask questions and provide feedback before a planning application is submitted to Liverpool City Council.

There was also a pop-up information stand at Anfield Road on Monday 25 February ahead of Liverpool's Premier League victory over West Ham United.

Updated proposals can also be seen on the Anfield Road expansion online hub at liverpoolfc.com/anfieldroadexpansion.










VIRGIL
4
FIRMINO
9
LIVERPOOL



ON TH

E ROAD

From the Flat Iron to the King Harry, along Anfield Road some things change, some stay the same

Words: David Cottrell



It took six thousand staples to secure the football pitch to the ceiling of the saloon bar in the Flat Iron. "I know," says licensee Sean Dunne, "because there's a thousand staples to a box and I went through six of them. They all thought I was mad putting grass up there. You can see where the staples went in, I call them stud-marks."

Below the artificial turf, which has its own penalty-area marked out in white, are four big stencil portraits of Bob Paisley, Bill Shankly, Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher, and on the next wall a montage showing Shanks with stars from his two great Liverpool teams and an old-school club crest.

This isn't just a pub, it's part-shrine, art gallery and social hub.

Dubliner Sean, along with business partner Alan Brown, has run the Flat Iron and Breckside Hotel for four years, on the tight corner-plot at the southeast nexus of Anfield Road and Walton Breck Road, five minutes from the ground.

On matchdays "you can't move in here." Among the regulars are "the Athlone crew, about 45 of them, and a dozen from Dublin. For the Norwich game we had a load in from Cork, they come over four or five times a year. And there's the Bridgwater crowd from Somerset, 15 of them for every home game including the European ones."

Popular with away supporters, too, the bar and backroom are only part of this local landmark's charm. Up two narrow flights of stairs, linked by a landing with a floor-to-ceiling image of the famous building in New York from which the pub takes its name, is the accommodation.

"When we took over we gutted all the upstairs and put in ensuite guest rooms," says Sean matter-of-factly as he opens the awning window of one to reveal the stadium's silver-grey mass on the near horizon brooding over rows of Welsh-slate rooftops. Some view, and who knew? 'Modesty is the art of encouraging people to find out for themselves how wonderful you are', proclaims a poster for Jameson downstairs.

Back outside it's quiet. It's Tuesday lunchtime, there's no game today. This is Anfield Road when the football isn't looking.

Its eponymous primary school – motto 'Aim High' – is 133 years old, still going strong but hushed for the summer holidays. On the next block the old red-brick police station has a stone Liver Bird under a grinning face carved in sandstone, straight from the pages of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The story goes, five of the streets which intersect Anfield Road like step-ladder rungs were named after the builder's children: Lillian, Elsie, Gertrude, Miriam and Edith. One hundred years ago they were home to Liverpool players too, legendary skipper Alex Raisbeck for one living on Elsie Road.

Between here and the hulking Arkles pub at the corner with Arkles Lane/Utting Avenue, some of the Victorian terraced houses – all pale-yellows, buffs and creams – have seen better days, but many more are beautifully maintained. Dinky window panels sit atop front-doors inside wrought-iron railings still sporting their original rose motif. In the late 19th century these were homes to skilled labourers and white-collar workers like stonemasons and seamstresses, book-keepers and bank clerks – some of the first generation to 'go the match'.

Onwards on the road's north side is the turreted no73, also known as Stanley House. Built in 1876 for John Houlding, founding father of Liverpool FC, then as now it overlooks the park of the same name.

Today Houlding is immortalised in bronze at the opposite corner of the stadium while down on Oakfield Road matchgoers frequent his Sandon Hotel where the players used to change and 'King John', chairman of the Liverpool Brewers' Association, sold his own beer. Inside, Stanley House reputedly had more than 20 rooms, the finest with high ceilings and marble fireplaces, and a billiards table on the top floor – from which there must be a belting view today of the Shankly Gates opposite.

Three years ago they were relocated here at the entrance to the Sir Kenny Dalglish Stand's concourse (formerly the Centenary Stand and before that Kemlyn Road) as part of the Main Stand expansion which coincided with the team's dizzying resurgence under Jürgen Klopp.



Fifteen feet up, above the legend 'YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE' and embellished with swirling gold acanthus leaves, is to all intents and purposes the Shankly heraldic device: the white cross of St Andrew and a green-stalked thistle with a bluish-purple flowerhead, together denoting Bill's Scottish roots, and a crest bearing a blood-red Liver Bird to symbolise his sustained passion.

It's all because of Bill, this place of history and hokum where they stood and swayed on one great terrace in their thousands "to cheer and to chant, to shout and to sing, and to split open the sky, the clear and starlit Anfield sky" – as author David Peace characterised Spion Kop folklore in his Shankly homage, *Red or Dead*.

The gates were unveiled in 1982, the same year that the Anfield Road stand became all-seater. In 1997 it got its upper tier, adding an extra 2,500 to its capacity.

It remains the smallest of the four stands and it's taken a "sustainable solution, one that works financially," as Mike Gordon, president of Fenway Sports Group, explained in 2015, to justify the new planning application featured earlier in this issue. Hitherto Liverpool FC's primary focus has been the new training complex over in Kirkby, on track to meet its completion date in summer 2020.

The pavement gets wider in the shadow of the stand. On the other side of the landscaped verge, between the car-park (plus cycle-hub) and the zone reserved for broadcast vehicles, the Family Park fills up quickly on matchdays – a place to soak up the atmosphere, enjoy live entertainment, mingle with fellow fans and meet club mascot Mighty Red if you're into your cuddles.

It gets similarly busy in Paisley Square, linked to Anfield Road by 96 Avenue, home to the Hillsborough Memorial, the Anfield Forever stones, the new Bob Paisley (and Emlyn Hughes) statue, and eight granite benches honouring Liverpool greats: Elisha Scott, Billy Liddell, Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, Kenny Dalglish, John Barnes and Steven Gerrard.

Lake Street and Lothair Road used to be here, and somewhere under the elevated Main Stand podium was the house on Anfield Road that belonged to brewing brothers Joseph and John Orrell.

In 1885 they sold the nearby sports field to Houlding, then president of Everton FC, for 5,228 pounds, eleven shillings and eleven pence, plus legal costs.

Anfield Road has a different vibe to Walton Breck Road on the other side of the ground. It's bordered to the north by greenery while the latter for the most part is grittily urban and at the heart of a regeneration project led by the council, the club and Your Housing Group. A work-in-progress, it's been held up by the government as a textbook example of "community-led, place-focused regeneration."

Expanding the Main Stand – while, as FSG put it, retaining "the heart and spirit of Anfield" – has been key to this. Walton Breck will have a new high street, home already to LFC's shiny superstore and the popular Kop Bar as well as independent success story Homebaked – Twitter hashtag #morethanapie.

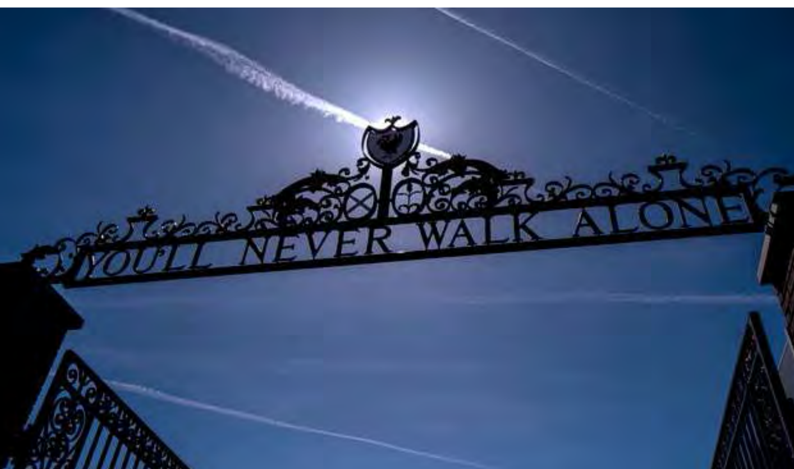
This is becoming somewhere attractive to live and work. This is a place of opportunity.

Back on Anfield Road, past the LFCTV container-studio and the path to the park, the housing on the north side is less dense and more substantial. It was an exclusive neighbourhood 150 years ago where wealthy merchants from the booming seaport threw up the kind of grand designs your average professional footballer might live in today. Some of them still have their names inscribed on ancient stone gate-piers, like Anfield Lodge at no13.

They say the name 'Anfield' comes from the 'Hangfields' or narrow strips of land which were here long before the football venue, but there could be another provenance. An Ordnance Survey map from 1845, held by the city's Central Library record office, shows buildings in the area called Annfield House, Annfield Villa and Annfield Cottage, none of which remain, plus Annfield Lane which eventually became Anfield Road.

There was also a St Ann's Hill House. St Ann or St Anne, by coincidence, was often depicted in a red robe and known as the









patron saint of sailors and a protector from storms.

Either way, history resonates through a name which esteemed sports author Simon Inglis calls "a powerful asset in terms of heritage and international renown."

This season they've come from all over the world to see the fab Trent Alexander-Arnold mural on the corner with Sybil Road. Painted by Akse, the French graffiti artist behind the Klopp mural in Liverpool's Baltic Triangle, and commissioned by the Anfield Wrap podcast team, it's made the 20-year-old full-back "incredibly proud" and will be used to support Fans Supporting Foodbanks.

Across the road three pairs of stuccoed villas, numbers 35-45, provide a handsome backdrop. They date from 1860 and their first residents included a timber merchant, a tobacco manufacturer and the manager of the Liverpool & London Insurance Company.

Next it's Epstein House, birthplace of Beatles manager Brian and fresh from a 2015 appearance on Alex Polizzi's Channel 5 show *The Hotel Inspector*. Then at no21, Hotel TIA, where Trent spent his Christmas Day last year providing festive dinners for 60 families from underprivileged backgrounds and giving presents to their children.

Kamilla Herstad is one of the four-strong management team which opened the hotel (TIA stands for 'This Is Anfield') six weeks before Liverpool's Champions League final against Real Madrid in 2018. They've hardly caught their breath since.

"We've had the bar extended in the beer-garden and there'll be astro-turf for kids to play," she says from her office inside the former vicarage, which has eight guest-rooms over three floors plus a basement-bar and much-loved 'shuffle-board' games-alcove.

A typical match weekend can consist of a Friday-night quiz (George 'Voice of Anfield' Sephton has been among the hosts), pre-match singalong with Jamie Webster and Sunday Q&A sessions with an LFC legend.

"Bruce Grobbelaar often calls in for a pint before the game. We call him 'The Godfather'. We've had John Barnes, Robbie Fowler, John Aldridge, Ian St John, Alan Kennedy and Phil Thompson."

Outside, Anfield Road has been more or less straight for its first half-mile northwest from the Flat Iron. Now it dog-legs to the left and no5, Rosemeath Cottage, incongruously appears: a little lodge in dark sandstone hard against the roadside.

Liverpool, says the flickering-lightbulb brigade, has a flair for time-lapse phenomena and it's as if we're back in the 1800s,





catching birdsong from the hedgerows and glimpsing sails down on the Mersey. Next-door is Abbey Lawns, a care home which used to be a school and before that the stuccoed residence of sugar magnate and gallery founder Henry Tate. The records says that it's the road's earliest surviving villa.

This is thirsty work. No55, the King Harry, heaves into view where Anfield Road follows the old ward boundary between Walton-on-the-Hill, which included Anfield (which didn't become part of Liverpool until 1895), and Everton township.

An English Heritage book about the wider area describes this pub as "a fanciful evocation of Merrie England." Publican and Reds supporter Chris Charnock has run it for three years and he's currently installing 'pods' – five rooms of capsule-style accommodation – on the first floor.

Like the Flat Iron, "you can't move downstairs on matchdays. We've got our regulars," continues Chris. "A group of them took a flag with 'THE KING HARRY' on it to the Super Cup in Istanbul – and our fans from further afield. They're all welcome." Whisper it but a band of Evertonians come here too – despite the rousing red decor – when the Toffees are at home.

Hang a right now for the final stretch: past the junction with Sleepers Hill and downwards to the southwest corner of Stanley Park. Hidden behind the high stone walls is the lovingly-restored Isla Gladstone Conservatory, dating back to 1870, and the swish Kemp's Bistro where Liverpool FC hosts matchday hospitality.

Edward Kemp was the man who landscaped the 110-acre park, which celebrates its 150th birthday in 2020. It adjoins the even older Anfield Cemetery where Alex Raisbeck is among several former Reds laid to rest.

It's here, in sight of Kirkdale across Walton Lane and the Soccer Bus stop, that Anfield Road ends. Make the pilgrimage on matchday if you can. It's about time.

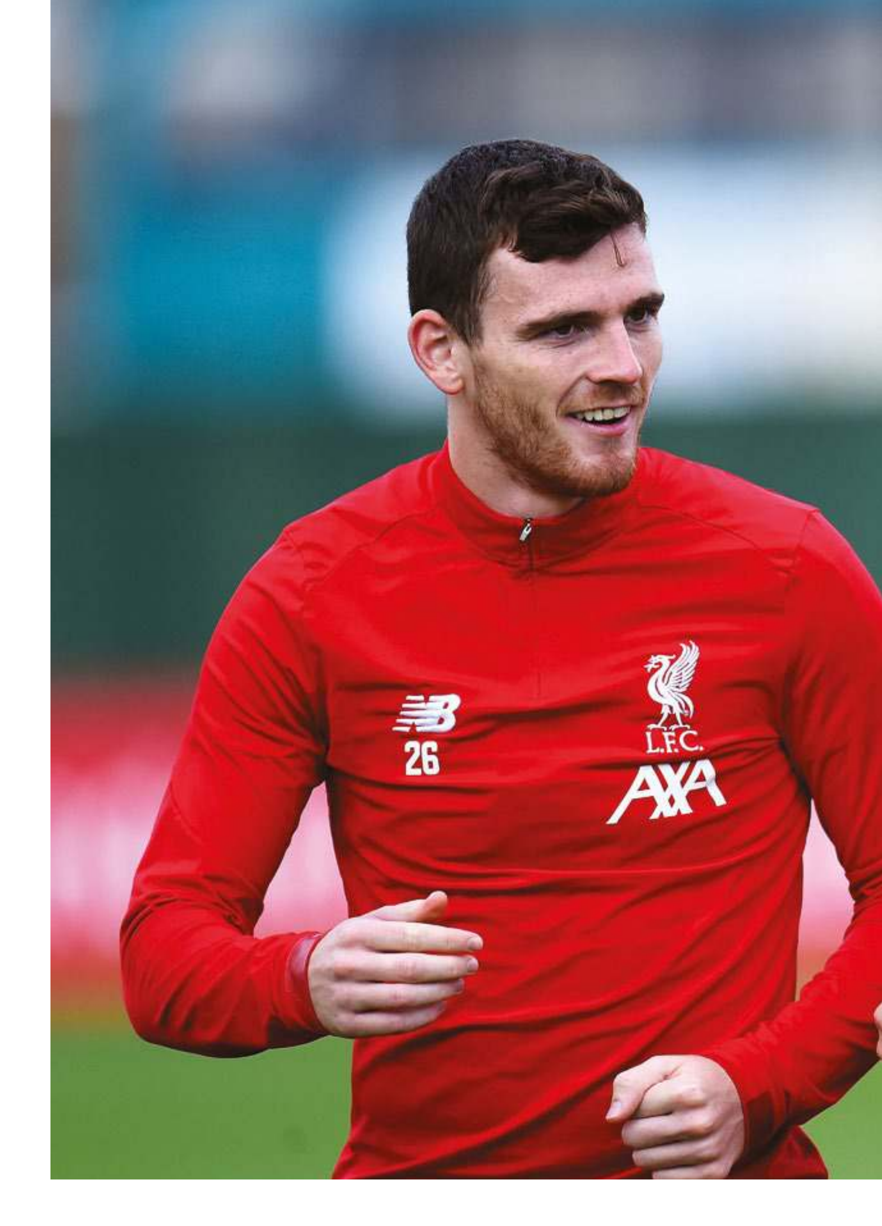


Heads Up
Standard
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L.F.C.

Andy Robertson

TALKING FOOTBALL

The left-back gets stuck into a number of topics from team-mates Jordan Henderson and Trent Alexander-Arnold, a special squad number, boyhood favourite and leaving a lasting impression at Anfield



HENDO'S A MODEL PRO

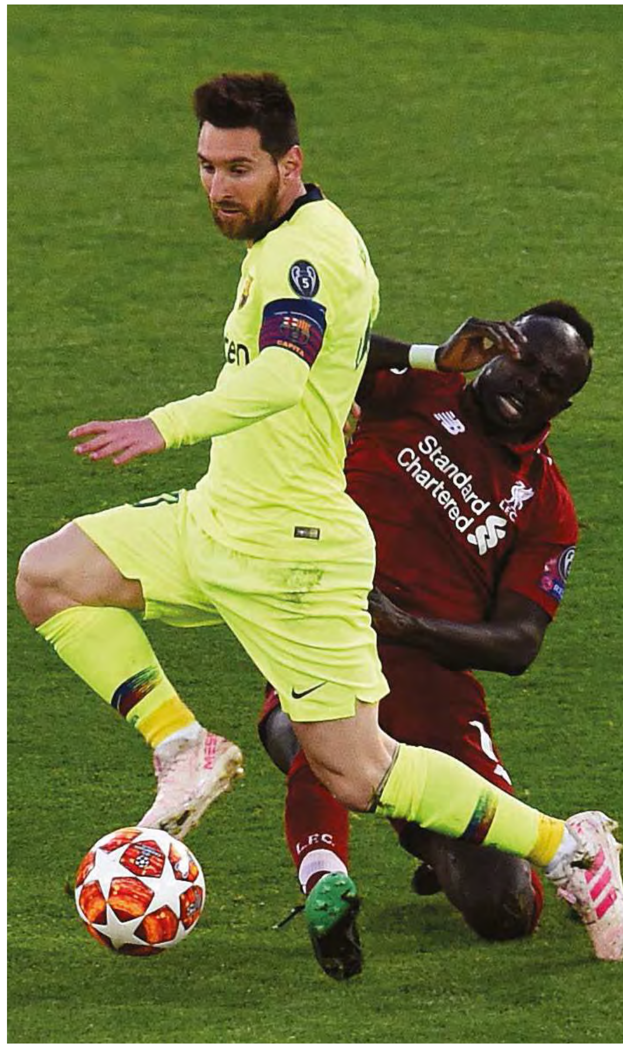
I've probably had a few role-models over the years, the first one being my dad. Both my parents were obviously important but as a young boy you always look up to your dad. In terms of now you only have to look at some of the more experienced lads in our changing-room in Jordan Henderson and James Milner by the way they conduct themselves and with the careers they've had. As a (kind of!) younger member of the squad, if I'm at their age still doing what they're doing I'll be very happy.

For me Hendo's the leading candidate to win the Player of the Year award. At times this season when we've struggled, Hendo's the one that's been driving us forward, whether it's making sure we don't get slack, or it's chipping in with really important goals or assists, his performances have been different class.

Maybe the performances towards the start of the season went a bit under the radar and throughout the whole season you can't say he's had a bad game. You really appreciate him when you train with him every day, he's probably been a bit under-appreciated in his career but now he's getting the recognition he deserves.

He's a fantastic player, fantastic role-model, fantastic captain and, as I say, he's driven us to three points this season at times when we've struggled. I'm probably a bit biased but I'd give it to him.







FACING THEM AT THE NOU CAMP WAS ONE OF THE TOUGHEST GAMES WE'VE PLAYED IN

MESSI IS A SPECIAL PLAYER

Over the last couple of years I've been very fortunate to come up against some of the players that are normally quoted [as the best in the world] with the Champions League runs we've been on. Coming up against Lionel Messi over two legs was one of the toughest challenges I've ever faced and I'd have to say him with how technical he is, how good he is, how you always have to second-guess throughout a game. He's a special, special player.

Barcelona are a team full of talent but he's the one that makes them tick. Facing them at the Nou Camp was one of the toughest games we've played in. We actually played pretty well and created a few chances but found ourselves 3-0 down with a bit of an uphill battle at Anfield.

Special nights at Anfield continued, luckily for us. A lot of people had written us off and the night before Vincent Kompany had whacked one in the top corner to pretty much clinch the league title for Manchester City so we knew this was pretty much our only chance of any silverware that season and luckily we went into it with the right attitude, the fans were in it with us, and a special night happened.


RAISE ALARM
LOG ROLL TEAM
1
7
14
26
26
L.F.C.
AXA



ME AND TRENT HAVE A LOT OF BANTER BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO THE SERIOUS STUFF, THE JOKES ARE PUT TO ONE SIDE

INSIDE NUMBER 26

There is nothing, really special behind it. I moved to Dundee United where I was going to get my first squad number and it was one of the numbers available.

It's been pretty good for me though and then I was able to wear it at Hull City and now here too. It's become even more special to be later on too as my son was born on the 26th so while it didn't have too much meaning at first it certainly does now and I can't see ever changing it.

HENRIK WAS MY BHOY

I don't think it's a secret that I'm a big Celtic fan. When I was younger I used to go to every single game with all the family and loved watching the team growing up.

Our main man was Henrik Larsson and probably every Celtic fan of my generation idolises and looks up to him because he was such a special talent. The best part of his career was with Celtic and fortunately we got to see some special goals and special performances from him.

TOP-NOTCH TRENT

Trent and myself have a lot of banter and make fun out of each other and have competitions and things like that, but when it comes down to serious matters. jokes are put to one side and, for me, Trent's currently the best right full-back in the world.

With the age he's at, he's only going to get better. The numbers he produces for assists are phenomenal and he's taken his game to a whole new level. Some people question his defending but I would disagree. He's such a strong defender, not many people get by him one-v-one and people can forget that he's only 21 and you are going to make mistakes at that age. Any that he does make. he more than makes up for with his assists and all the chances he creates for this team.



Maybe Trent's helped re-define perceptions of modern full-backs. The role started evolving maybe 10 years ago with players like Ashley Cole and Philipp Lahm, and you can look at the Premier League now and see Ben Chilwell and Ricardo Pereira doing amazing things at Leicester City.

But me and Trent have been coming up with numbers probably not seen before. It's become a more desirable position and you get a lot of big transfers in that position now too. Maybe clubs are seeing it as an important position now rather than failed wingers like it used to be!

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Who is faster, myself or Trent? With speeds and distances all recorded in football today you only need to ask the sports scientists and they'll tell you that the right-back won't be happy and the left-back will be. Let the stats speak for themselves – that's the proof in the pudding!

POWER OF SCOTLAND

I spent some of the winter-break in Scotland. It's no good for anyone if I come back here sunburnt and red all over so I thought I'd do the lads a favour and just go up to Scotland and stay safe! It's been quite an intense period and a few of us have been playing with knocks – myself included – so it's been a good chance for those to clear up and I've felt better for it in training. I've had injuries this season where maybe I shouldn't have played but that's the cause we're all fighting for and I'm sure it's the same at every club.

Apart from that it was nice to have a break and see some family and friends and just switch off from football. Now it's about getting back into the rhythm.



BACKING FOODBANKS

I've always been associated with Fans Supporting Foodbanks. I wish I wasn't, as that would mean they didn't exist. I don't like going to foodbanks, I don't like seeing people suffer and we should be doing a lot more to help these people.

Unfortunately it's become part and parcel of society these days and become more common, so when people are in an unfortunate position then I like to give something back. Fans Supporting Foodbanks are a massive organisation and do such a good job. It's clever to be around football stadiums for collections and hopefully they continue To get big collections because that means there are fewer people going hungry. Unfortunately it's a society issue, bigger than one person, but I know a lot of people are trying to change it.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Of course, leaving a legacy here at Liverpool is something that drives us on. You could say we're in the Liverpool history books because we've won the Champions League but you do want to be *the* team that everyone can look back on in 100 years and not remember which year we won the league because we won a few.

We know it's going to be hard but that's what we want to do and hopefully we can keep ticking off those trophies and by the end of our careers have a nice little collection.

WE KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE HARD BUT LEAVING A LEGACY IS SOMETHING WE WANT TO DO AND HOPEFULLY WE CAN KEEP TICKING OFF THOSE TROPHIES AND BY THE END OF OUR CAREERS HAVE A NICE LITTLE COLLECTION


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VIRGIL VAN DIJK

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

What his team-mates say, what the boss thinks, and why everyone else is a full-time fan of Liverpool FC's Dutch colossus

"Lionel Messi is probably best player I have seen in my life. But the last season I can not remember a more impressive season by a defender ever than Virgil van Dijk."

Jürgen Klopp


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"Virg is an exceptional defender, in the moment 100 per cent the best defender in the world, so he deserves that [UEFA Men's player of the year award] absolutely. I'm so happy for him. I'm happy for us as well because he knows that without the boys around him, he cannot win that prize. It's a prize for all of us but we send our big man there to get it. It's big."

Jürgen Klopp



"Virgil van Dijk from Liverpool impresses me most. He is almost two metres tall, he is able to win all the balls with his head, he is quick and can read the game very well. He makes you think that he is impassable."

Neal Maupay, *Brighton & Hove Albion*

"I don't think it's easy to measure what he does for us as a team. He's such a dominant character, a dominant player. He's a special player and we're lucky to have him at the club – he's my big brother! He's a top player and a top person to be alongside."

Joe Gomez

"There has always been talk in the Netherlands about the fact there should be a 'next Jaap Stam'. Then at a later age came Virgil van Dijk. He is perhaps better than I ever was. Virgil is without a doubt an impressive appearance"

Jaap Stam, *former Dutch international*

"Virgil van Dijk is one of the best in the world. He is the complete defender, always calm, a great player. The spotlight usually goes to the strikers, so it is nice to see a special defender get deserved recognition. I'm very happy for him."

Carles Puyol

"Virgil van Dijk. Wow, what a player, signing him and Alisson just took them to the next level. I could have taken him to Hull. I had dinner with Kenny Dalglish and the owner of Celtic, Dermot Desmond, in Barbados – I'm name-dropping now – and Desmond was saying he couldn't understand why nobody has gone for Van Dijk, so I tried to get him before he went to Southampton but I had no chance."

Steve Bruce, *Newcastle boss*

"I don't think anybody really knew too much about him but then two, three months into the season the lads were saying 'this guy is a player'. He just became the Rolls Royce of the team."

Scott Brown, *Celtic skipper*

"Beast of a player, beast of a man, my goodness what a player."

Roy Keane, *Sky Sports*

"He's the best in the world... We never doubted that his progress would be as superb as it is."

Neil Lennon, *Celtic boss*


10 OKTOBER 2019
RESPECT



"If you talk about consistency from one player over a year, who wins the European Cup and is absolutely faultless in every performance, that means you deserve to win the Ballon d'Or."

Steven Gerrard

"The mutual interaction between the Dutch boys is great anyway, but with Van Dijk I am learning from the best defender in the world."

Sepp van den Berg

"I've got the pleasure of playing next to him and he is a fantastic role-model, fantastic player, fantastic centre-half. He makes it look easy but that's all the hard work he has put in. He tries to improve every single day."

Andy Robertson

"Virgil is like a thoroughbred horse, he very rarely gets injured"

Phil Babb

"When you have Virgil van Dijk – the giant – on the pitch, maybe it scares the opposition. For me, he is special. I have great defenders in front of me: Joel, Joe Gomez, Dejan. But Virgil has something special, he is the main man."

Alisson Becker

"He is a world-class player and the best I have played with. We benefit a lot knowing we have players like Virgil giving us the protection behind us."

Trent Alexander-Arnold



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"NOW LET'S CARRY ON"

The boss says the aim is to go again after LFC's unbeaten 442-day Premier League run came to an end at Watford last month. "I am not celebrating a 44-game run, I don't know the number. I know things like this are really difficult because the boys have to beat everything: each little pain, big time, each inner voice, each voice from outside, stuff like this, the influence from everywhere – you can't lose anymore, you cannot do all that stuff. That's the world so we have to stay on track. What the boys did so far is exceptional, but it is not over. That is the only thing I am interested in. We will go again, I promise 100 per cent and then we will see where it leads. Now let's carry on."



GOOD LUCK CRITCH!

U-23s coach Neil Critchley left the club in early March to take up the position of head coach at League One side Blackpool. After six-and-a-half years of outstanding service within the Reds' Academy set-up, the 41-year-old also took charge of the first team for two games this season, overseeing the Carabao Cup tie at Aston Villa in December and the FA Cup fourth-round replay win against Shrewsbury at Anfield. Jürgen Klopp said: "It's a nice challenge for him, a nice opportunity. He wanted to take it, he asked the club and we said, 'Yes, of course.' It's really nice because it shows it's possible that you can make your way as a youth or U-23s coach as well and that's always what we wanted to have."



99 RED BALL GAMES

Mohamed Salah ended February on the brink of making 100 Premier League appearances for Liverpool. The Egyptian ace made his 99th league outing in the rare defeat at Watford. He has scored an astonishing 69 goals in that time and needs just four more to take his place in the Reds' all-time top 20 league marksmen. In the Premier League era only Robbie Fowler (128), Steven Gerrard (120), Michael Owen (118) have scored more. Luis Suarez also netted 69 league goals for the club.

AWAY SCREENINGS

IN THE KOP BAR



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16th March
Kick off 20.00



Manchester City
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Brighton & Hove Albion
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A DOZEN MORE ASSISTS

Trent Alexander-Arnold spoke of his delight after matching last season's tally of 12 Premier League assists with his double-contribution in last month's win over West Ham. The 21-year-old full-back also became the third-youngest player to record 25 Premier League assists, behind Cesc Fabregas and Wayne Rooney. He said: "I'm happy to help the team as much as possible. That was my aim going into the season – to get over 10 again. And as the season's gone on, it's been about trying to push the limits and trying to break as many records as I can, try and push myself as far as I can, try and help the team as much as possible and get assists, goals and contributions."

THE BIG MAN'S UP FOR BARCELONA

He's big, he's Red, he's said he's going to play in the forthcoming, mouthwatering LFC Foundation Legends Charity Match against Catalunya's finest ex-stars



Peter Crouch is the latest name to confirm he will play for Liverpool FC Legends in the LFC Foundation Charity Match against Barça Legends at Anfield on Saturday 28 March.

The sell-out fixture, which is presented by AXA – the club's official training partner – already has a whole host of legends set to line up again on the famous Anfield pitch, but Crouch will be making his Liverpool FC Legends debut.

Signed from Southampton in 2005, Crouch famously struggled to break his goalscoring duck for the Reds. It took him 1,229 minutes before he finally found the net with a deflected strike against Wigan Athletic at Anfield. He then promptly scored again 23 minutes later!

Should a similar drought follow at Legends level then, if he played once at Anfield every season, Crouchie would get his first goal in 2033 shortly after his 52nd birthday! Hopefully that won't be the case and he'll hot new heights against Barca Legends.

"Rafa Benitez was delighted with my work when I went







18 games without a goal and made a point of telling me," he recalled in his 2019 book *I Robot*. "It made no difference. There was still a small part of me dying inside.

"There is a pleasure that comes in laying on a goal for someone else, but compared to scoring one yourself if doesn't touch the sides. It's like meeting the most funny, beautiful woman you've ever seen and you reacting to her leaning in for a kiss by offering up your mate's mobile number."

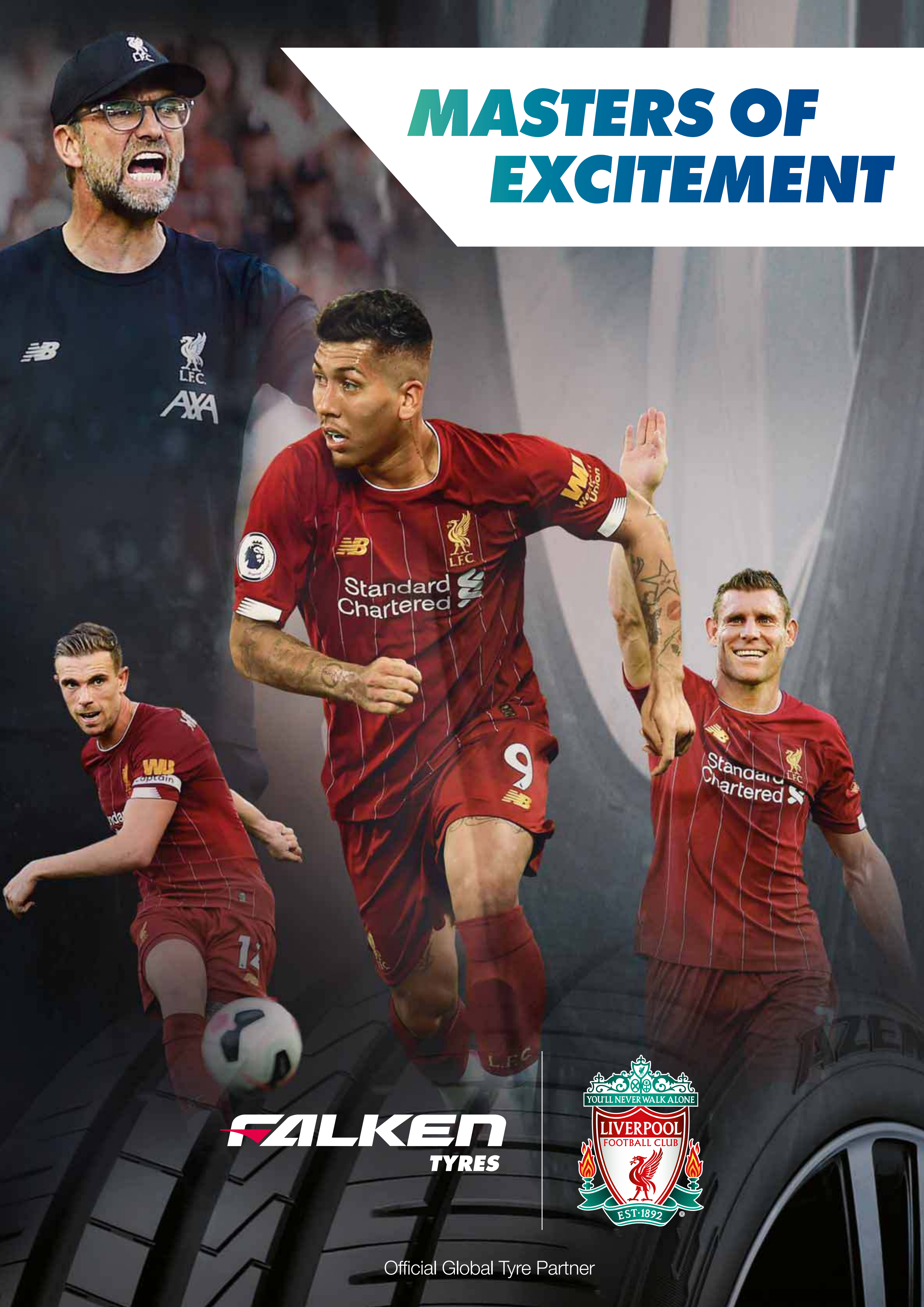
Sir Kenny Dalglish will take charge of the Liverpool FC Legends side with his former strike partnership Ian Rush and John Aldridge part of the coaching staff.

Without wishing to put them under any pressure, Liverpool FC Legends are unbeaten at Anfield and the last time Barcelona's first-team visited Merseyside things went very well!

Aldridge was on the scoresheet when the Reds beat Real Madrid Leyendas in the first-ever LFC Foundation charity match at Anfield in 2017. He added the second goal after Michael Owen opened the scoring for his former club in red against his former club in white.

Robbie Fowler and Steven Gerrard made it 4-0, but three goals in the last 10 minutes – one from ex-Red Fernando Morientes – ensured it finished 4-3 to Liverpool FC Legends.

Afterwards, Gerrard dedicated the win to Ronnie Moran



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who had passed away earlier that week at the age of 83 having spent 49 years of his life playing and working for LFC.

"We'd like to mention 'Mr Liverpool', Ronnie Moran, and dedicate this victory to him," he said. "It's been a difficult week for the current players, the ex-players, the supporters, but none more so than Ronnie's family. So on behalf of everyone at the club, we're behind them and hopefully today's victory cheers them up that little bit."

A year later, Liverpool FC Legends and FC Bayern Legends played out a hugely entertaining 5-5 draw. Dirk Kuyt, Owen and Fowler had the Reds 3-0 up in 17 minutes, but the Germans responded with goals from Luca Toni, Alexander Zickler (2) and Paulo Sergio. A Fowler free-kick, on the stroke of half-time, made it 4-4.

The second half was a slower affair and it looked like FC Bayern would win it when Xabi Alonso, who'd played for the Reds in the first-half, smashed a free-kick past David James. But cometh the 88th minute, cometh the ice-man – as they say in Norway – and an unlikely equalising goal via a spectacular volley by Bjorn Tore Kvarme.





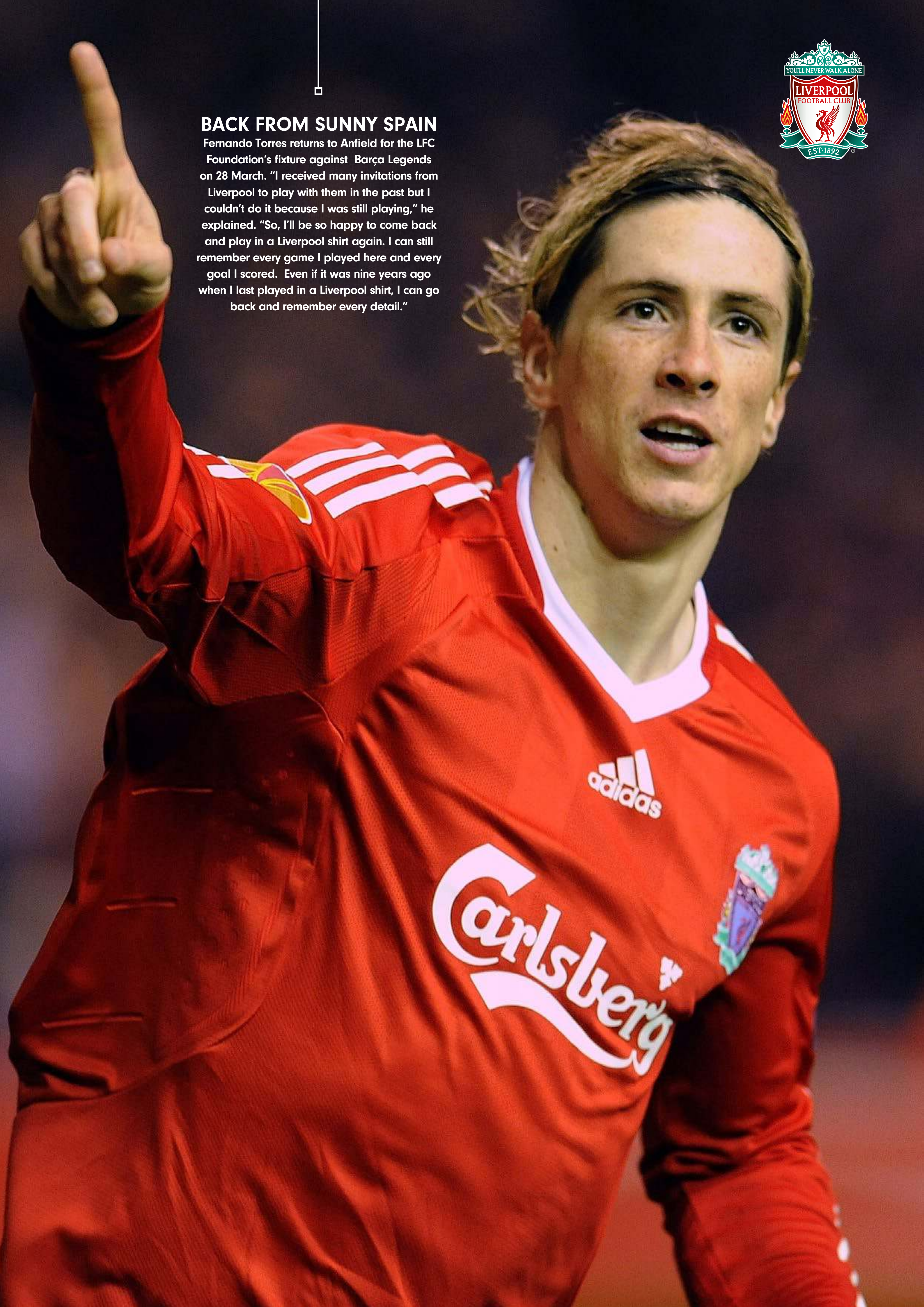
Had Gerrard not hit the post in stoppage-time, Liverpool FC Legends would have won again – but he was saving that moment for Milan Glorie.

Cafu, Costacurta, Gattuso, Pirlo, Rui Costa, Kaka, Serginho and Inzaghi all played for the Italians while 64-year-old Alan Kennedy did an 11-minute stint for the Reds before being replaced by Djimi Traore. The only goal of the first half came from Fowler.

Djibril Cisse made it 2-0 early in the second half, but Pirlo, from a trademark free-kick, and Giuseppe Pancaro had the scores level going into the final minutes. Time for Stevie G.

Receiving a Cisse pass on the edge of the box, the Liverpool FC Legends skipper turned the ball back onto his right foot before striking a low shot in off the far post to give the Reds a 3-2 victory.

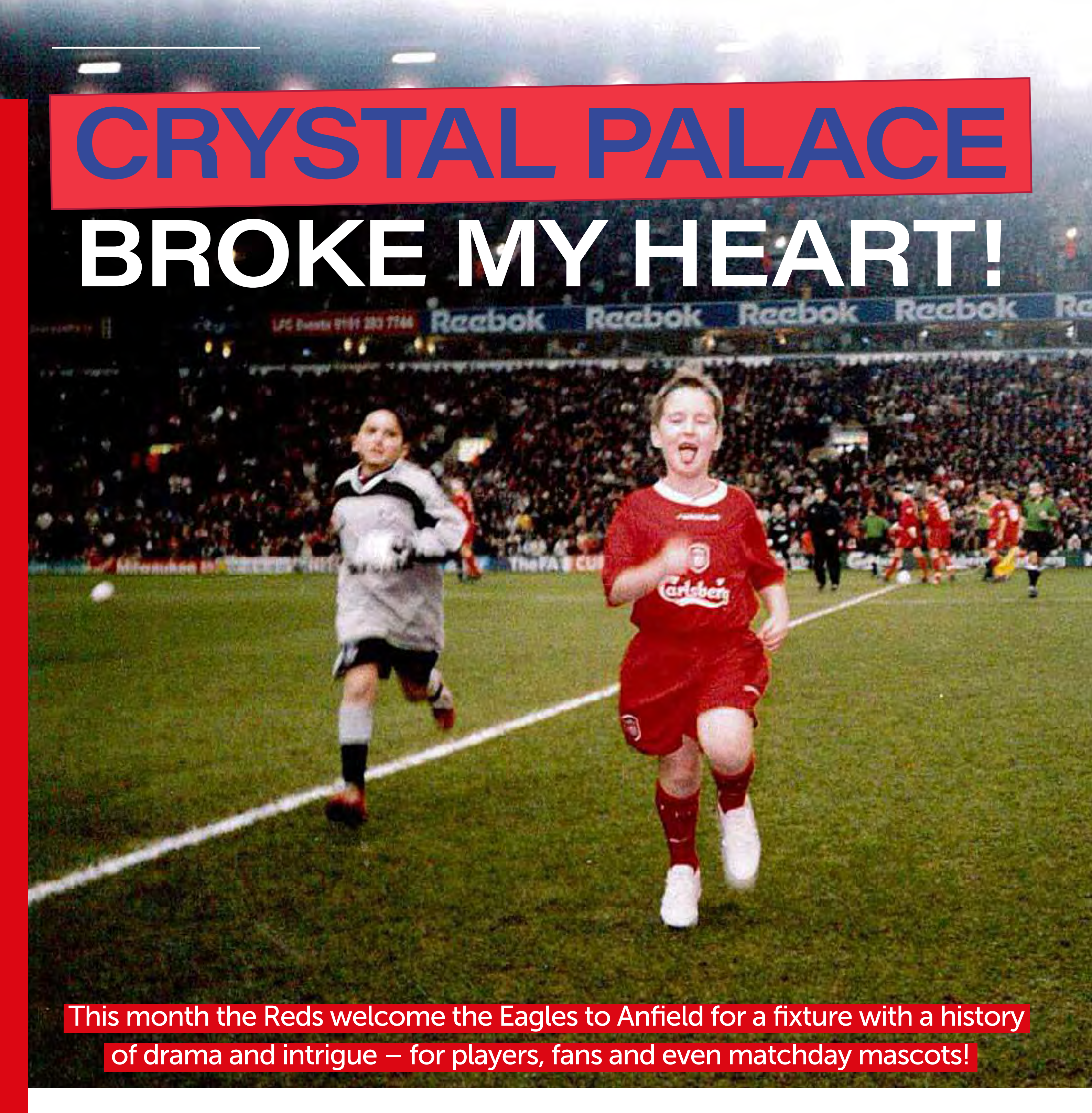
They'll be hoping for more of the same against Barca Legends and with the likes of Fernando Torres, Luis Garcia, Steve McManaman, Patrik Berger, Vladimir Smicer, Sami Hyypia, Jamie Carragher, Daniel Agger and Jerzy Dudek lining up against Edgar Davids, Patrick Kluivert, Juliano Belletti and Javier Saviola, it promises to be another memorable day for the LFC Foundation and everyone inside Anfield.



BACK FROM SUNNY SPAIN

Fernando Torres returns to Anfield for the LFC Foundation's fixture against Barça Legends on 28 March. "I received many invitations from Liverpool to play with them in the past but I couldn't do it because I was still playing," he explained. "So, I'll be so happy to come back and play in a Liverpool shirt again. I can still remember every game I played here and every goal I scored. Even if it was nine years ago when I last played in a Liverpool shirt, I can go back and remember every detail."

CRYSTAL PALACE BROKE MY HEART!



This month the Reds welcome the Eagles to Anfield for a fixture with a history of drama and intrigue – for players, fans and even matchday mascots!

Despite the last five encounters resulting in Liverpool victories over Crystal Palace, echoes of the visiting fans' chorus of "You must be sick of us!" at Anfield from back in 2015 and 2017 are still quite fresh in the memory when the Eagles travel to L4.

Palace are said to have the strongest recent claim to being Liverpool's 'bogey team', but how true is this? I have my own personal perspective which goes like this...

Walking up the steps of the old Main Stand player's tunnel and running onto the hallowed Anfield pitch for the very first time, was a moment I knew I'd never forget. Sami Hyypia shouted, "Peter!"

I turned as he played a pass to me. I was through on goal, Kop end with a gaping net. I shot and the ball rolled slowly toward the goal for an eternity before gently running into the side-netting on its way in. The Kop cheered in celebration.

That was it, I'd achieved my dream, I'd scored in front of the Kop in a full stadium at the tender age of eight. The only downside was that, other than a missed penalty during a pre-season training session on the pitch in 2013, this is the closest I will ever come to scoring for Liverpool.

It was February 2003 and I was the matchday mascot as the Reds lost 2-0 to Crystal Palace in a fourth-round FA Cup replay.

My mum had sent a letter to the club requesting that I could be selected. I was the lucky one whose name was drawn out of a hat. The whole day was a magical experience, from meeting then manager Gerard Houllier in his office pre-match, to 'scoring' the goal tassisted by Hyypia, to enjoying a passing drill with Bruno Cheyrou and John Arne Riise in the warm-up. Everything except the result.

I still remember the huge juxtaposition of being among my heroes Emile Heskey and Michael Owen, meeting my dad's idols and club legends Phil Neal and Alan Kennedy in the hospitality lounge and being able to run on that pitch.

Compare that to the dejection at the end. I was still young and perhaps unappreciative of the magnitude of the disappointment



Words: Peter Kenny Jones

that surrounded that result, but you could see it on the players' faces.

I remember Didi Hamann, cheese butty in hand, forcing a smile as he made his way through the players' lounge. Danny Murphy and Owen were silent, Hyypia similarly forced a generous smile as he fulfilled his duty of being the captain on the day.

Unfortunately for all Liverpool supporters, he had assisted the only goal Liverpool fans would celebrate that night.

It was the happiest moment of my life. But for them, it was a day they wanted to forget. Only now, looking back at this experience, can I fully appreciate the responsibility that the players have on their shoulders.

It's not just, as some may presume, 90 minutes and then a fancy car-ride home. They must represent the club together and fulfil duties, such as entering the players lounge and posing for pictures with an enchanted eight-year-old mascot. This despite being embarrassed less than an hour earlier in front of 35,000 people

and the waiting media who were baying for an upset, which they ultimately received.

Liverpool had just been humbled by a side from the division below, who were down to ten men for the final 20 minutes of the game.

This being the replay, following a goalless draw at Selhurst Park, it provided the Reds with a second chance, this time at home, to avoid a cup banana-skin two seasons after winning the trophy in the famous treble campaign of 2001.

However, Houllier's side were unable to break down the staunch Palace back-line despite a plethora of shots from Liverpool's off-the-boil attack. Ultimately a Stephane Henchoz own-goal and Julian Gray volley meant a 2-0 defeat.

That was 17 years ago, and the Eagles have beaten Liverpool on six more occasions since that day, three of them at Anfield. This is a side that in their 114-year existence has never finished a league season above Liverpool, and in the 54 competitive matches between the two, Palace have won a modest 14. But many Reds fans still look for Palace the fixture-list with a degree of apprehension.

Just over four years ago, Jürgen Klopp was a mere seven games into his reign at Anfield before the arrival of a Palace team with Alan Pardew at the helm. Klopp was still unbeaten and presented with an early opportunity to dispel the bogey team perception.

The Eagles had won both the previous two meetings. The most recent had been in May 2014, which soon became known as 'Crystanbul', a fixture no Liverpool fan needs reminding of.

In the next meeting, in November 2014, the Eagles went on to win 3-1 at Selhurst Park, securing Liverpool's worst league start since 1992. The return fixture that season was Steven Gerrard's last-ever game at Anfield. Palace again won 3-1 and completed their first league double over the Reds.

Whether Klopp was armed with the fixture's recent history or not, the Anfield faithful were more than aware of the danger that Crystal Palace possessed. The Eagles won again, a late Scott Dann winner enough to make Klopp comment after the game: "After 82 minutes I saw so many people leave the stadium. I felt pretty alone at that moment.

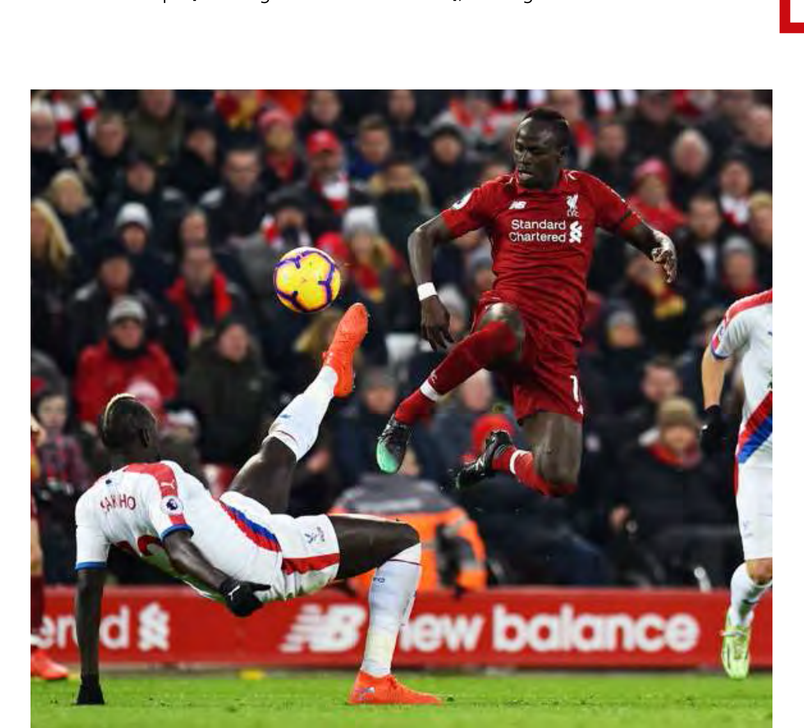
"We decide when it is over. Between 82 and 94 minutes you can score eight goals if you want but you have to work for it."

The boss was certainly right as his tenure has been brimming with late goals and comebacks ever since. Nevertheless at the time this was a manager just weeks into his new job and memories of previous meetings may have played on the minds of players and supporters alike.

It's an angle that the media picked up on. The *Liverpool Echo* stated: "Having stormed Stamford Bridge [the Reds had won 3-1 at Chelsea] and then ended a three-year wait for a win on their travels in Europe [winning 1-0 at Rubin Kazan], ridding Palace of their bogey-team tag proved beyond Jürgen Klopp."



TRUTH BE TOLD, BEFORE THE NOTORIOUS 3-3 DRAW, PALACE HAD ONLY WON THREE OF THE LAST FIFTEEN ENCOUNTERS WITH THE REDS



The *Evening Standard* reported: "Palace were no doubt encouraged by the fact they were viewed as Liverpool's bogey side, at the back of their mind that 3-3 draw from 3-0 late in the season that Brendan Rodgers almost won the title."

And the BBC added: "Palace are quickly becoming Liverpool's bogey team, inflicting damaging results on the Reds over the past three seasons."

Truth be told, before the notorious 3-3 draw, Palace had only won three of the last fifteen encounters with the Reds. The Eagles were simply enjoying a purple patch against a Liverpool side very much in transition from the end of the Rodgers reign into the new Klopp dynasty.

It was a similar context in the early 1990s. Liverpool had famously humbled Palace 9-0 in September 1989, the first time they had ever scored nine in a top-flight game and a club-feat that has not been repeated since.

Seven months later, of course, Pardew's Palace shocked the



football world with a 4-3 FA Cup semi-final victory at Villa Park. If this wasn't enough to view them as a bogey team, it paved the way for another period of notable success for the South Londoners.

Between the 9-0 and a meeting between the two sides in December 1992, Liverpool and Palace played each other eight times in just over three years with Liverpool winning only three times. Palace's recovery from the joint-biggest defeat of their history was undoubtedly praiseworthy.

The game in late 1992 resulted in a 2-1 extra-time victory for Palace in a League Cup fourth-round replay, just as it would when I'd be the matchday mascot eleven years later, but this time at Selhurst Park.

Palace defender Andy Thorn was just that in Liverpool's side as he scored the winner that prompted *The Guardian* to comment: "Liverpool may well go to their graves with Crystal Palace written on their hearts. Last night a Palace team apparently weakened beyond the point of all reasonable expectation still managed to remove Graeme Souness' side from the Coca-Cola Cup."

It was perhaps the most damaging defeat for Liverpool in the history of this fixture to date. The Reds subsequently lost FA Cup replays to Bolton Wanderers then Bristol City and Souness would resign in January 1994.

That was then and this is now, and Liverpool are a very different animal indeed. Even so, who remembers last season's Premier League fixture at Anfield, on Saturday 19 January 2019?

It ended in a 4-3 victory for the Reds but only after the hosts trailed 1-0 after half-time. Despite dominating possession Liverpool fell behind after Andros Townsend slotted home from Wilfred Zaha's cut-back from the byline.

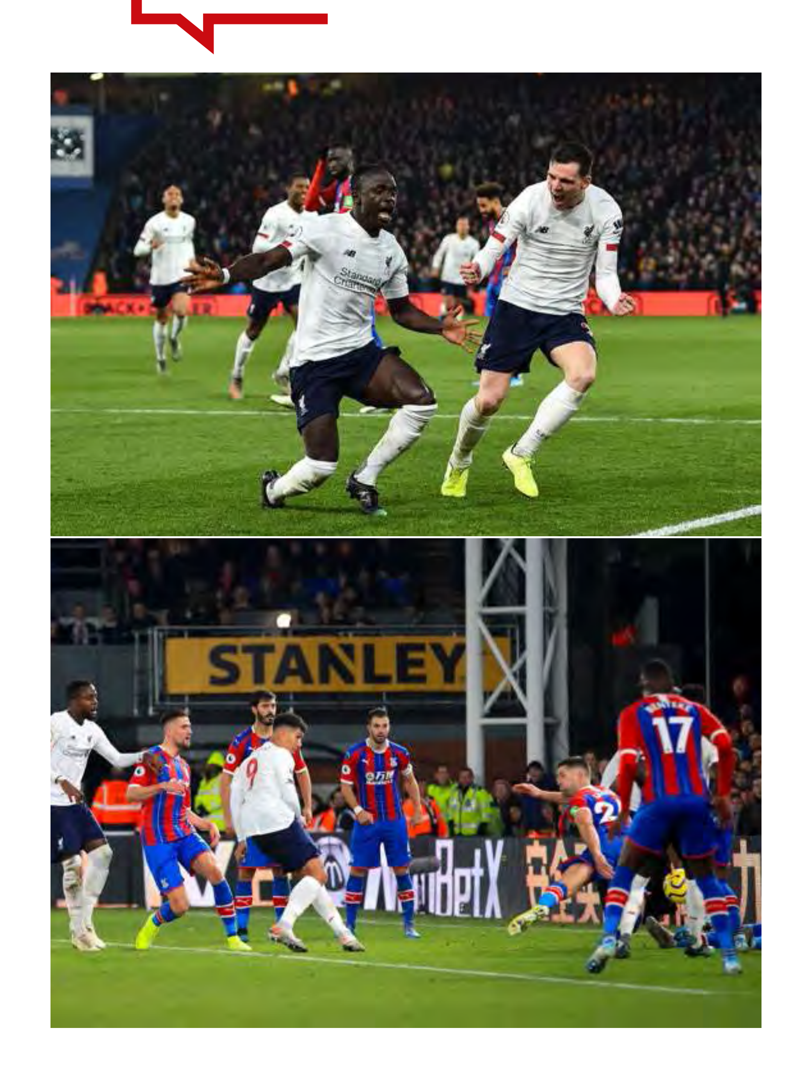
Mo Salah equalised within a minute of the restart and Bobby Firmino put the Reds in front with the club's 1,000th Premier League goal at Anfield. But the nerves jangled again when Palace centre-back James Tomkins headed home from a corner to make it 2-2.

Salah struck again with his 50th Premier League goal – and 48th for the Reds – after Palace keeper Julian Speroni failed to deal with a James Milner cross. Milner was then sent off by his former schoolteacher Jon Moss following a second bookable offence before Sadio Mane became the first Liverpool player to score in four consecutive games against Palace to make it 4-2 in added-time.

Even then, Palace sub Max Meyer stroked home a third goal for the visitors to make for an anxious final minute.

Liverpool v Crystal Palace, as it stands, takes place on Saturday 21 March 2020. A Reds win is what we all dearly hope for, but don't be too surprised if it isn't quite as straightforward as normal!

MO SALAH EQUALISED WITHIN A MINUTE OF THE RESTART AND BOBBY FIRMINO PUT THE REDS IN FRONT WITH THE CLUB'S 1,000TH PREMIER LEAGUE GOAL AT ANFIELD





TEENAGE



Words: Chris McLoughlin
Photos: Nick Taylor

KICKS

They were born within two months of each other, have played in central midfielder for over a decade, are inseparable at The Academy and both made their first starts for Liverpool against Shrewsbury Town at Anfield in the FA Cup. Jake Cain and Leighton Clarkson talk us through their fledgling Reds careers so far....



HOW OLD WERE YOU BOTH WHEN YOU CAME TO THE ACADEMY AND HOW CLOSE ARE YOU AS MATES?

Leighton: I was seven when I came here and Jake was five. We've known each other for 11 years now as we've been mates from the start and we both come from Lancashire.
Jake: Where we're from maybe had a part to play in how close we are as our families have known each other for years too.
Leighton: On the pitch we've got a good partnership in central midfield so that's probably why we're also as close as we are.
Jake: We've both played in central midfield from the start and I think that's given us both a very good understanding of each other's games. We know how each other play and we complement each other's games as well as we've had this partnership since the age of seven.
Leighton: I think there's a natural understanding between us because we've had so many years playing in midfield together and we're similar types of players. We know what we can do and we know what we can ask of each other on the pitch, so it is good in that way.

DO YOU PREFER PLAYING AS DEEP CENTRAL MIDFIELDERS OR FURTHER FORWARD?

Leighton: It doesn't really bother me, to be fair. Obviously if you're playing further forward you get more chances to attack but less time on the ball. So it varies, depending on where I'm asked to play, but it doesn't really bother me either way.
Jake: I prefer playing a bit further forward. I like getting chances, scoring goals and making assists, but like Leighton I'm happy to play anywhere in midfield as well.

YOU'RE BOTH LANCASHIRE LADS. WHAT'S THE DRESSING-ROOM BANTER LIKE WITH THE SCOUSERS?

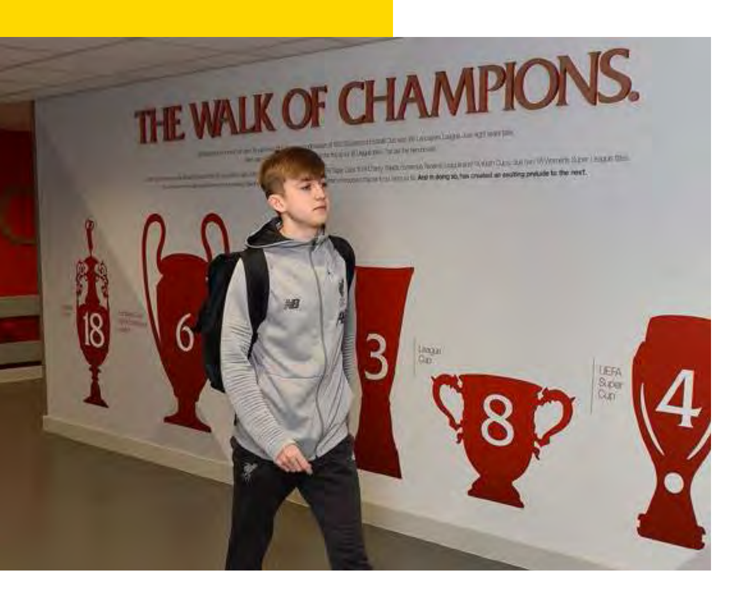
Leighton: Er, it's...a bit different! There are quite a few Lancashire lads here, not just us two. Niall Brookwell and Rhys Williams, who is out on loan, are also from Lancashire and Rhys has family from round by mine. Jake and Niall support Wigan Athletic, I support Blackburn Rovers and Rhys supports Preston North End, so there's a bit of banter between us all around that.
Jake: We get a bit of stick from the Scousers about where we're from, but we've got better banter than them.

LEIGHTON, YOU WERE ON THE BENCH FOR THE FIRST TIME AGAINST MK DONS IN THE CARABAO CUP AND THEN IN THE NEXT ROUND AGAINST ARSENAL AT ANFIELD. WHAT WERE THOSE EXPERIENCES LIKE?

Leighton: Surreal, really. I've been playing football since such a young age and when you're young you don't really think about things like that. It's only when you start getting older that you realise what things could be like. I didn't get on at MK Dons, but to experience being part of the first-team squad – the changing-rooms, the amount of fans that were there – for the first time is something I won't forget. For the game against Arsenal there were more fans there, so I was probably more nervous for that game than the first one because Anfield is Anfield, it's our stadium.

YOU DIDN'T GET ON IN EITHER GAME, SO HOW WERE YOU FEELING SAT ON THE BENCH?

Leighton: I was desperate to get on, but I was nervous at the



WE'VE BOTH PLAYED IN CENTRAL MIDFIELD FROM THE START AND I THINK THAT'S GIVEN US BOTH A VERY GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHER'S GAMES

same time. I feel like if it was to happen now I wouldn't be as nervous because I've got that experience, but I was nervous with it being the first time at Anfield.

THE ARSENAL GAME FINISHED 5-5 AND WENT TO PENALTIES. WOULD YOU HAVE TAKEN ONE IF YOU GOT ON?

Jake: Ooooh [looks intently at Leighton]!

Leighton: Erm, I didn't take one in the Youth Cup final last season because I'd gone off, so I don't know. I'd have had to have seen in the moment how I was feeling. Obviously you don't know how you're going to feel until you get a moment like that, so I can't really say if I'd have taken one.

JAKE, YOU WEREN'T INVOLVED IN EITHER GAME – OR THE CARABAO CUP QUARTER-FINAL AT ASTON VILLA. HOW WERE YOU FEELING WATCHING YOUR ACADEMY TEAM-MATES GET OPPORTUNITIES?

Jake: Of course I was happy for them because they've been working hard to get that moment. I was pleased for them to get their chance, but on my behalf it was disappointing not to get selected. It gave me more determination to keep pushing on and show that, if other people can do it, then so can I. It was the same for the Aston Villa game, it was disappointing not to be selected for that too.

Leighton: I made my debut against Aston Villa in the Carabao Cup and, having experienced being on the bench against MK Dons and Arsenal, I wasn't really as nervous. Obviously we took a very young team with us to that game, so it was different again. When I knew I was coming on about 15 minutes from the end we were 4-0 down, but I just wanted to get out there and prove to the right people what I can do and why I should have started the game.

Jake: It was a massive night for the Academy. It showed the world what this Academy is made of and the result didn't reflect the game. I thought Liverpool were dominant in the game and the lads were unfortunate to be so far behind, but they proved to the world that Under-23 level is a good level and that the kids pushing to get into first-teams are actually good players. Not as many come through nowadays, but it proved that we've got kids who can play.
Leighton: It was the youngest-ever Liverpool team at the time on that night, but a lot of the boys weren't that nervous because we've been playing with each other for quite a while. A lot of us have known each other for years and we were the underdogs. That can work in your favour, so we weren't as nervous as people might have thought and it seemed like that on the pitch. It wasn't a 5-0 game at all.

HAVING BEEN KNOCKED OUT OF THE CARABAO CUP AT ASTON VILLA DID YOU THINK THAT WOULD MEAN FIRST-TEAM OPPORTUNITIES WERE OVER FOR THIS SEASON?

Jake: There's always a maybe with events and injuries the first-team can have, especially with the amount of games they have in a season and being involved in the Champions League. So you always think maybe you'll get a chance and maybe the first-team manager might let some of the younger players play because he trusts us. So I'd say there's always a chance that you could get in and around the first-team, but there's never a definite moment when you think you will get a chance.
Leighton: After the first-team drew 2-2 at Shrewsbury in the FA Cup a bit of me thought we might get a chance in the replay because of the winter-break, which we all knew about. Then another part of me thought that after drawing they needed to win the replay, so the manager might play a similar team to put things right. I was thinking both things, to be honest.
Jake: When we heard that the first-team were going on their



winter-break and wouldn't play against Shrewsbury in the replay I just thought 'this is my chance to push on now and prove to everyone what I can do'. Although I was disappointed not to be involved in the Villa game, I felt it was my chance to put that right and show everyone why I deserve to be in the team.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU DISCOVER YOU'D BOTH BE STARTING AT ANFIELD AGAINST SHREWSBURY IN THE FA CUP FOURTH-ROUND REPLAY?

Jake: The day before it, really, in the walk-through. We had an idea about the team when we all trained together in the days before the game, but it was only the day before when the nerves were kicking in for me.

Leighton: It was a good feeling to know I was starting and I only got nervous on the day of the game. We trained together before it three times as a squad to get an understanding between us. It was a big game for all of us, not just myself.

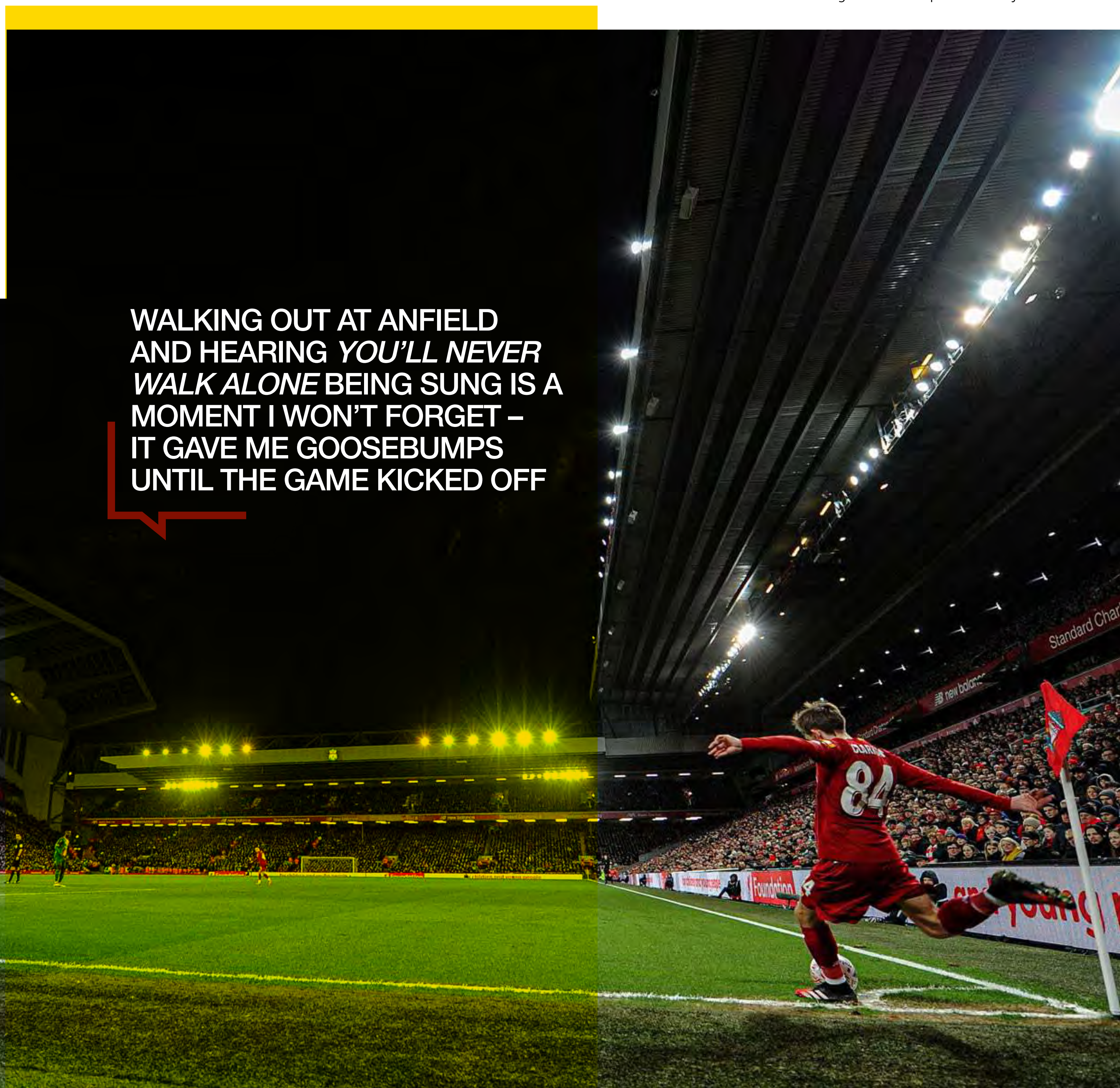
Jake: I was nervous so in the dressing-room before kick-off I spoke to a few of the lads who'd already had first-team experience. They were just saying 'trust yourself' and that once I got myself into the game I'd be fine. They helped me through it and after the first couple of minutes I settled in and the crowd were very supportive of everyone.

Leighton: Walking out at Anfield and hearing *You'll Never Walk Alone* being sung is a moment I won't forget. It gave me goosebumps until the game kicked off. It almost makes you feel up for it even more. The Liverpool fans were behind us and once I'd had a few touches of the ball I settled in and just played my normal game.

DID IT HELP PLAYING IN THE SAME MIDFIELD AS EACH OTHER? AND DID YOU EXPECT TO WIN?

Leighton: We've been playing in the same midfield for years and I'm best mates with Jake so it was a good feeling knowing he was there with me playing in the same game.

Jake: I'd say exactly the same thing. Obviously there is also an expectation level when you play at Anfield and while I wouldn't say it played on our minds, we didn't want to let the fans down. You don't want to give a bad impression of yourself



WALKING OUT AT ANFIELD AND HEARING *YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE* BEING SUNG IS A MOMENT I WON'T FORGET – IT GAVE ME GOOSEBUMPS UNTIL THE GAME KICKED OFF





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Thank you for your continued support with foodbank donations. We hope that you'll continue to help us tackle food poverty in 2020.

We'll be hosting a foodbank collection at our home matches this season.



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- Cereal
- Soup
- Pasta
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- Tinned tomatoes/pasta sauce
- Lentils, beans and pulses
- Tinned meat
- Tinned vegetables
- Tea/coffee
- Tinned fruit
- Biscuits
- UHT milk
- Fruit juice
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You can donate any whole amount up to £20 by texting **FOODBANKFC**, plus the value eg **FOODBANKFC10** means you'll donate £10.

WE ARE LIVERPOOL. THIS MEANS MORE.

on a night like that, so it was about proving to the fans how good you are and making them feel proud of you.
Leighton: I wouldn't say we expected to win, but everyone of us had belief. We were all confident going into the game because we've been playing well with the Under-23s since we've been promoted to that squad. We just saw it as a shot for us, an opportunity, and we had belief – especially going into the second half – that we could nick a goal.

SHREWSBURY SCORED AN OWN-GOAL TO PUT YOU AHEAD WITH 15 MINUTES TO PLAY. ARE YOU THINKING AT THAT POINT 'WE'VE GOT THESE' AND WHAT WAS IT LIKE AT FULL-TIME?
Jake: The crowd were going wild when the goal went in and I just thought to myself 'this is unbelievable, I want more of it!' It was an unbelievable feeling when the goal went in and it just spurred us on to keep going and defend with all we had. Luckily it paid off.
Leighton: The final whistle going was the best moment, the best moment so far of my career. Just everything about it was great. There were positive feelings everywhere. A lot of people had come to watch me from back home, and a lot of Jake's family were there too. A lot of people who had helped me since I was young were also there, so knowing I had played well, we had won the game and they were all there was even better. I was trying to pick some of them out in the crowd in the warm up, but I couldn't see them. When we were walking around clapping the fans at the end, and then walking back to the tunnel, I could just see my mum waving her hand. Then I could see everyone and our families were sat together.

NEIL CRITCHLEY LED THE TEAM THAT NIGHT, AS HE DID AT VILLA. HE HAS SINCE TAKEN CHARGE AT BLACKPOOL, BUT HOW INFLUENTIAL HAS HE BEEN ON YOUR CAREERS?
Jake: He was very supportive and the big thing is that he gave us trust. He trusted us in that Shrewsbury game and he gave us the right tools – clips and video analysis of the other team – to go out there and counter what they can do. It was an unbelievable night for Critch as well, winning his first first-

THE CROWD WERE GOING WILD WHEN THE GOAL WENT IN AND I JUST THOUGHT TO MYSELF 'THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE, I WANT MORE OF IT!'





team fixture at Anfield, and an unbelievable night for everyone at the Academy as well.

Leighton: Critch was very good for us both. He was watching us since we were about 12 and spoke positively about us to other coaches. Just after Christmas, we got promoted by him to only play Under-23s football from now on. That gave us both a huge lift because it's what we both thought we deserved. In training he was at us because he knows how we can play. So if we were playing poorly, or not doing what we should be doing, he'd tell us. He tells you the truth and that's what is good about him.

Jake: You've got to keep maintaining your standards here. If you let them slip there are always other players who are good enough to come in and take your place. So when Critch kept getting after us it made us keep going and determined to play better because the first-team don't let their standards drop, so it should be the same for us. We need to be good enough to take their places, so we should be working even harder. If we didn't work hard enough, he'd tell us, which was good as it kept us honest.

THE FIRST-TEAM AND ACADEMY WILL ALL BE ON THE SAME SITE HERE IN KIRKBY NEXT SEASON WHEN THE NEW TRAINING GROUND OPENS – IS THAT IMPORTANT?

Leighton: I think it's important because we're striving to be over there at the new training base and not over here at the Academy. In your head in training you'll be thinking you want to be over there, so I think seeing the first-team being so close is a good thing as it'll spur us on.

Jake: I think it'll give us all a burst of energy to want to be around them, especially with the first-team doing so well and winning trophies. We want to be part of that as well, so watching them train so close to us will gives us a boost and a buzz. We've both been up to Melwood quite a few times and training is a lot quicker and more intense. The coaches are always on you and pressing. It's just very intense and the players are very loud, but they communicate with you. They help you when things are tough, and they help you when things are going well.

Leighton: They're world-class players and every time I've been to Melwood the standard has not dropped once. There has not been a session that I've thought has been bad. Every single session has been very good and there are a lot of leaders there as well, which is good. The manager has also spoken to us after every session when I've been up there. He comes and shakes our hands before and after sessions and speaks to us during sessions. He'll compliment us when we've done something good and, of course, Pep Lijnders has known us for a long time because he used to be our coach. We've got a good relationship with Pep, which helps


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IT'S ALSO GOOD TO SEE LADS LIKE CURTIS JONES AND NECO WILLIAMS MORE INVOLVED WITH THE FIRST-TEAM BECAUSE IT SHOWS THAT IF YOU'RE CAPABLE, YOU CAN GET A CHANCE HERE

us as well while we're over at Melwood.
Jake: The first-team coaches watch every game. They know us, they know how we play, they know what we're all capable off. They also know what we need to work on and what we're good at, so there's a good understanding of us from the first-team staff.
Leighton: It's also good to see lads like Curtis Jones and Neco Williams more involved with the first-team because it shows that if you're capable, you can get a chance here. The boss and the coaches put their trust in youngsters and knowing they trust our abilities is important. Obviously the manager has got world-class players all around him, yet he still helps us as much as the first-team, if not more. That's a good thing for everyone here at the Academy.

FINALLY, WHAT ARE YOUR AIMS FOR THE REST OF THIS SEASON?

Jake: Probably just to maintain my place in the Under-23s team and keep pushing to get better. Hopefully there are a few more chances with the first-team, because they have a congested game schedule, but I just want to keep pushing to become a better player.
Leighton: Just to keep improving every day because you never know what can happen. We've seen what has happened with a couple of the first-team games featuring young players, so maybe another one of them might pop up again. The Under-23s are also still in a lot of competitions, so it would be nice to win one of them.

CHALLENGE REDS

CHALLENGE REDS
CHALLENGE REDS

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NIGHTRIDER LIVERPOOL // 11TH JULY 2020

ROCK & ROLL MARATHON // 23RD MAY 2020

CATHEDRAL ABSEIL // 15TH AUGUST 2020

MERSEY TUNNEL 10K // 19TH APRIL 2020

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#ChallengeReds brings Reds together to improve the lives of others. Take part in one of eight challenges in 2020 and raise life changing funds with the Club's official charity.

WHAT ARE YOU MADE OF?





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"I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS – THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB, THE LEGACY, JUST THE THINGS WE SHARED AS PLAYERS – BUT THERE IS NO OTHER CLUB LIKE IT"

Ex-Reds flyer Jason McAteer on the lure of Legends football and the cause closest to his heart

Interview: **Harri Aston**

How excited are you about playing for the Legends again?
I love it, it's one of the highlights of the year for me. I love the fact that we put a game on every year, in fact two or three every year. We've made a bit of a circuit with the Legends matches, with the likes of Milan and Bayern Munich and Real Madrid [all at Anfield] and Borussia Dortmund [in Hong Kong].

We've played all those teams over the last four or five years and made a phenomenal amount of money for great causes which has been put back into different charities and initiatives, which is what it is all about.

The flip-side of it is we get a fix of playing football again for this fantastic club. We get to put the shirt on, get together with old friends, reminisce, catch up, and then ultimately get on the grass again. For the head, it's amazing. For the body, it's the worst thing you can possibly do when you're 48!

How is your fitness at the moment?
I still run, I get out and play golf and try to eat relatively healthy, although it's quite difficult with young kids. You always finish off the McDonald's, nuggets and biscuits that are left over!

I'm relatively fit. It's more a case of the body holding up. I played in a charity game in Singapore and ended up tearing my plantar fascia ligament [on the sole of the foot] which was really sore. But straightaway I was seeing a club doctor and then a club surgeon and they were looking after my health, so it speaks volumes for the club that they supply that support when any of the players are injured, it is amazing.

At the moment it takes me a good hour to get up in the morning and get going, but once I'm up straight I'm all right!

When you left Liverpool for Blackburn Rovers in 1999 you must have thought your days of wearing red in front of the Kop were over...
Playing at Anfield again for the first time was a special moment. For me, getting older, obviously you can't go on forever. At the back of my mind, I'm always thinking is this the last time?

I ran out against Bayern Munich and there is a picture that caught me looking at the Kop. The fans were singing *You'll Never Walk Alone* and I kind of remember saying to myself: "This could be the last time you ever do this so you've got take it in and savour it."

I remember embracing what was going on and living that moment as though it was the last time. It wasn't, but the next one might be because the team is getting younger and I'm getting older!



Do you enjoy the experience of playing with the younger players?
Being on the pitch with Steven Gerrard, Daniel Agger and Glen Johnson, which I never got the opportunity to do when I was playing, is fantastic. Fernando Torres is going to be the new one [at time of going to press]. So to play with these players I haven't played with before is a privilege.

Steven still keeps himself trim. It helps being a manager as I'm sure he joins in in training and stuff. To see them at almost their best, still...you see how Steven scored the winner at the end against Milan last year. It's great to be on the pitch and appreciate how good they were.

It must be great being back in the dressing-room with your old pals as well...
It's crazy because, although I've got friends from the different clubs I played for, whether it be Sunderland, Bolton or Blackburn, I've never experienced a closeness of one single bunch of lads from different generations. I can go as far as saying I've got Graeme Souness as a friend, Phil Neal as a friend, right up to James Milner.

We're all so close, I don't know what it is – whether it's the history, the legacy of the club, just the things we shared as players – but there is no other club like it.

Jose Enrique will be returning for the Barça game, having played against Borussia Dortmund for the Legends in Hong Kong last year after recovering from cancer...
Jose has certainly been through a difficult time, and to see the love and affection for him when he came to Hong Kong was just like...it gets you emotional. I think it would have been nervous for him to come into what we had, but as soon as he came in everyone gave him a big hug.

Within 10 minutes you are part of the family. That's just what's it's like. It is a great support network as well we have for each other.

You've also been fortunate to play in a few away games for the Legends, including the maiden fixture at the Bernabeu in 2015...
Going away is pretty cool because you are away for five or six days. Just to be able to be around the lads for that amount of time is pretty amazing. Our first one was Read Madrid away and there was obviously the excitement about going to the Bernabeu, but you're not sure how many fans are going to turn up and they essentially make the game a success or not because it's all about fund-raising for charity.

To have 75,000 people at the game was phenomenal. The intensity of the match, the level of quality on the pitch and then so many people there... It was the first time in probably five or six years that I'd gone back into that environment, that situation, so that was pretty amazing.

That's the other thing, the club stays very professional even though it's a charity game. Everything is done as though it's matchday for a first team – you actually are a footballer for the day. It's like asking someone if you could do something again and they're making it come true, it's that kind of feeling. It's like Christmas Day, it's brilliant.









The money raised from the Legends match will be going to LFC Foundation which has launched several new mental-health projects – a cause close to your heart...
Absolutely. I'm a big advocate of changing the views of young people to help them later on in life.

We were at a school with a bunch of 10-year-olds and tried to create an awareness for how they feel, what they can do, steps they can take, and not feel there is a stigma around not being able to talk. To feel that they can open up and go to teachers, parents or friends and say, "I've got a problem" or "I need help."

If we can put things in place now to help them combat certain mental-health issues such as anxiety, stress – let's hope it doesn't get as far as depression but we know it's going to because it's there – we can put blocks in place that they can use. If we can explain to them that it's okay to feel like that but you've got to get help with it, and you'll be pointed in the right direction and given help, then we're hoping they will come forward and won't hold this stigma against feeling that they're different, feeling it's difficult to express themselves because they will be laughed at or ridiculed.

They've got to be able to be confident that they can do that. If we can do that on a vast basis then that's how I think the stigma will be broken down.



Do you feel we've made a lot of progress in this area in recent years?
From a footballer's point-of-view, dressing-rooms now are completely different to how they were when I was playing. I think managers and staff have taken on that over the past 20 years and have moved with the times. They are more open to players coming to them with mental-health issues.

Back when I was playing it was looked upon as a sign of weakness, and I'm not saying any manager wouldn't be there for you, I would just never go to that manager for the fear of being dropped, sold or ridiculed, the fear of it getting out in the media.

Managers now are very open-armed and want players to come to them with problems because, ultimately, they want the best person out on the pitch, producing their best football, and if that means they can help from a mental-health aspect then they'll do that. I know this football club, right from academy to first team, they've got people to help players with those problems.

From a social point-of-view it is obviously broader, we are trying to break down the stigma around mental health. If you've got a platform, like I feel that I have, then if you can help one person then we're doing our job.

You've previously spoken about the issues you've faced...
I remember when I was poorly, I thought I was normal. I thought staying in the house was what I wanted to do, so what was wrong with that? When I look back at that person I think: my god, what were you doing? I didn't want to pick the phone up, I was in the bath all the time. I was having four or five baths a day just to fill up the time, because I thought that was my comfort, it's where I wanted to be.

I spoke to a therapist and she said it was like being in the womb, that's where you are. You think that's crazy, that you're just getting in the bath, it's what I like for half-an-hour, just lying in the bath, but then that voice in your head starts taking over and it's like you don't want to go out.

The lads would ring and you would ignore the call, or you might get a job and you may think you can't be bothered doing that. It takes someone then to sit you down and say, "I haven't seen you all week" or "What have you been eating?"

I literally had a breakdown and that was my sign, and then I ended up seeing someone and came through it, but some people aren't so lucky.

Your experiences led to you making a documentary for LFC TV called *Through The Storm* which examines the impact of mental-health problems in football and wider society...
The documentary for me was very uplifting, educational, sad, and our message ultimately is: don't be afraid to speak out and open up. Just because you are a footballer, it doesn't mean you can't share the same experiences as the man on the street.

We are in a privileged position, financially, but that's not to say when we go home we don't suffer the same emotions as anybody else, whether that's a death in the family or a break-up, pressures of work and performing. We are still normal people.

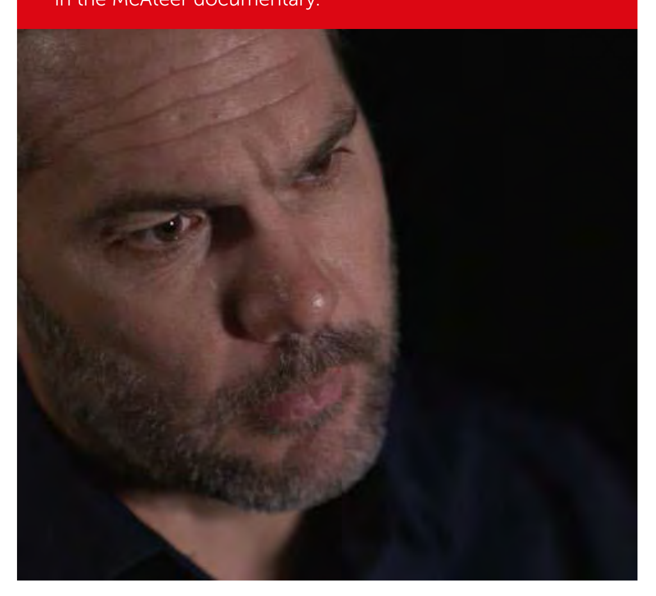
One of the biggest killers in men is suicide. If we can come out as footballers, ex-footballers, and say, "We've been in that situation as well and is what we did, we were brave enough to get help and sort ourselves out, then I'm sure you can do it as well," then I think that would help a lot of people.

ABOUT JASON'S DOCUMENTARY

Back in October 2018, coinciding with World Mental Health Day, the LFCTV documentary *McAteer: Through The Storm* was screened for the first time on World Mental Health Day.

The club also collaborated with the Liverpool Mental Health Consortium (LMHC) and Spirit of Shankly on campaigns targeting people in every walk of life in the hope that lives could be improved and in some cases even saved.

Across the country around 6,000 people die by suicide annually, and just short of 18 months ago Michael Woodburn, a much-loved Reds fan, was found dead in Norway. His loss was keenly felt by all who knew him and the fundraising efforts to support his family were testament both to Michael's popularity and the solidarity of Liverpool supporters. The same was true of Neil 'Yozza' Hughes, another Anfield regular, who died in similar circumstances in 2016. Neil's story, as relayed by his father Peter, was told in the McAteer documentary.



THERE FOR YOU

Meanwhile Macca backs new mental-health projects introduced by the club's official charity, LFC Foundation

Just recently Jason McAteer has been helping LFC Foundation launch new mental-health projects that will help children, young people and adults across its programmes.

The club's official charity is investing in a universal mental-health programme in partnership with Action for Children, which will be delivered in schools across Merseyside over 12 weeks. It's designed to help children recognise the signs of mental-health issues, look at techniques and strategies to improve their mental health and where to go if they have concerns.

The new funding will also support a dedicated professional councillor for LFC Foundation who will be available to provide crisis intervention to any participants referred by Foundation coaches and staff working in the local community.

In addition there will be drop-in community-based provision also led by specialists to provide advice and guidance, where needed.

It is planned that an adult male suicide prevention programme delivered with partners and specialist service providers will also be funded in the coming months.

The targeted programme will encourage men to talk if they have problems and how to look out for their friends' mental wellbeing too.

Matt Parish, LFC Foundation director, says: "This new investment will allow us to expand our current mental-health strategy and increase resource and provision across our programmes.

"Although the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing has always been a priority for the Foundation, this new funding demonstrates our ongoing commitment and will enable us to make a real difference. We are confident that the level of investment will increase over the next 12 months so that the level of support offered can grow.

"Research indicates that early intervention in children's mental health is really important so we know our new schools programme with Action for Children will provide essential knowledge and understanding of mental health, give children the confidence to talk about their feelings and equip them with coping strategies to support them.

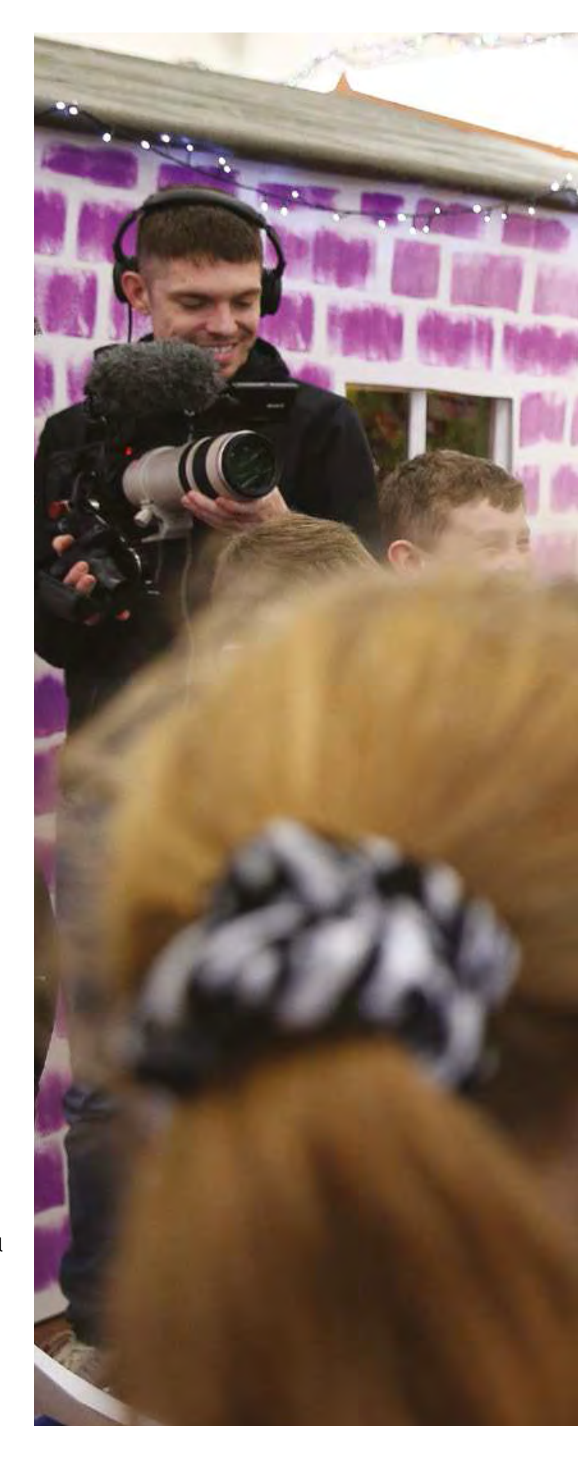
"Suicide remains the most common cause of death for men aged 20-49 in the UK, which is just appalling.

Through our new male suicide prevention programme, we plan to deliver accessible free, targeted support and crisis intervention to provide much needed guidance and assistance."

Mental-health advocate McAteer adds: "It's great to see the Foundation investing more money and resource into mental-health programmes and continuing its commitment to positively promoting mental wellbeing.

"I've had the opportunity to see some of their fantastic work in action and see the difference it makes.

"I think it's important as a club and foundation to show people that you care and that you're there for them."






FIRE EXIT
The Witches




L.F.C.
EH

EMMA

Experienced, focused and full of belief… Meet Emma Humphries, LFC Women's assistant-manager from Wellington, New Zealand

Since the advent of the FA Women's Super League in 2011, Liverpool FC Women have enjoyed several links with New Zealand.

Goalkeeper Aroon Clansey was one of the Reds first wave of overseas signings of the new era in the women's game and she has been followed by fellow Kiwi internationals Sarah Gregorius and Rosie White in pulling on the famous red shirt.

Since last season the link has continued in terms of the women's coaching staff. Wellington native Emma Humphries is Vicky Jepson's assistant-manager and a key member of the Reds' backroom team.

A former New Zealand international midfielder, she represented her country at the Under-20s World Cup in Russia in 2006 (scoring in a group game against the host nation) and the FIFA World Cup in China a year later. However an ACL injury triggered an early move into a coaching career that has so far encompassed spells working with New Zealand's women's youth development programme and a five-year stint in Canada with Vancouver Whitecaps.

"I had played football since I was five-years-old," she recalls. "I started off playing with boys at my local club and then between 14 and 16 I played senior women's football. I came through the age-group teams with New Zealand and got my first cap when I went away on my first tour with the senior team at 17.

"I was lucky enough to have quite a lot of experiences of playing at a decent level but I stopped playing quite young. I just felt quite burnt-out and had a year or two off completely. I think I went away to realise how much I loved it and that was when I picked up coaching – I would have been about 23 or 24. I did come back and play in our National League in New Zealand while I was coaching. I was training again with the Ferns (the national team) but then I tore my ACL and coaching became my career after that."

John Herdman, who is currently the national coach of the Canadian men's team, became something of an early mentor.

"John helped me get a job coaching with my local region and then I ended up working for New Zealand football as their women's development manager at the age of 25 or 26. That involved running the elite pathway for the girls but also working on the growth strategy for the game.

"Because I had just stopped playing it was quite good timing to get out there in the community and try to get more girls playing the game. While I was doing that I was lucky because I also got to work with a lot of talented players in the Under-17s and Under-20s youth national teams so I was able to go straight from my playing days into working with the top kids and learn off some really good people in coaching circles, such as John, along with that.

"John obviously now works in the men's game, but at the time he was one of the best women's coaches around."

After working in Canada between 2013 and 2018 Emma, who is now 33, was looking for a new role when the chance to move to the Women's Super League came about.

"I ran the girls' elite programme for Vancouver which basically involved the Under-17s and Under-20s national team players for Canada, all gathered together on the West Coast," she said.

"I was helping develop those girls for the national team, and ran that for five years on behalf of the Whitecaps.

"I absolutely loved my time working with those kids but I got to



I WAS ALWAYS HOPING THAT MY NEXT MOVE WOULD BE INTO THE FA WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE AND SO I FEEL I GOT REALLY LUCKY WHEN I MET VICKY

a point where I felt like I wanted a new challenge. I'd been helping develop some of the top kids in New Zealand for three or four years before that and then did it in Canada – a much bigger country for women's football – so I wanted my next move to be into senior football."

The timing was difficult with her partner Bev Priestman (Phil Neville's assistant-manager with the England women's team) and herself having just had a son.

"Bev moved here for work and naturally we'd been looking at England as an option for us because it was an opportunity for both of us to work in a top environment.

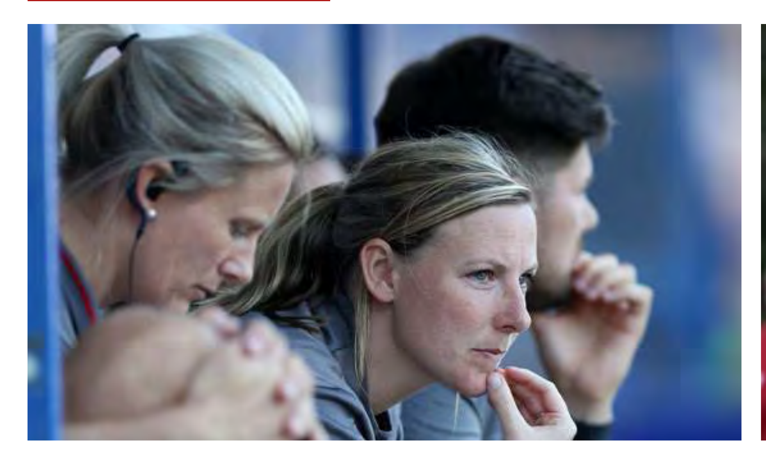
"Canada doesn't have a professional league for women. There is the [American] North Women's Super League but that would have meant moving to another country anyway, so we'd targeted this as a bit of the family move for both of our careers. I'd spent the last five years with an MLS club, albeit one on a much smaller scale than Liverpool, but I understood working in a club environment because I've worked day-to-day with clubs for quite a long time now.

"I was on maternity leave when we left Canada and moving countries with a two-month old isn't something I would recommend to anyone!

"But I was always hoping that my next move would be into the FA Women's Super League and so I feel I got really lucky when I met Vicky."

Former Liverpool FC Women's Under-23s assistant-coach Charlotte Healy, who now works as the WSL's Academy manager, was also key to the move.

"I connected in with women's development officers in the regions just to put my CV out there and see who I might meet. I was off work





anyway, so I thought I'd just see what was out there. I met Charlotte who saw my CV and mentioned that Vicky was looking for an assistant and it might be worth seeing if it was the right fit.

"I came to the training ground at Wallasey and did a session with the girls during one international break and I got along well with Vicky. I started part-time as I hadn't intended on working that quickly. I had initially thought I might take six months off but when an opportunity like this came up, I obviously bit Vick's hand off!

"We got along really well right from the start and it naturally became a full-time job for me. Now that my son is a little bit older, it was perfect timing really and Vicky was really good with integrating me into the set-up."

Although the young Reds squad face a battle to climb off the bottom of the Super League table in the next two months, Emma says the spirit and positive energy around the camp belies Liverpool's lowly league standing.

"Obviously the season's been tough. It's really pushed and tested all of us – as it should, regardless of where you're placed.

"It's not an easy thing when you're working so hard to try and produce things and not getting the results but what's quite amazing about the environment is that you come in each day and you would not know it.

"You see that people are happy, people are working hard and people are focused. Vick's created such a good environment amongst the players and staff. She's really good at staying set on the process of working towards the next fixture and taking things game by game.

"I think that's really, really important when you're sitting bottom of the league as we are at the moment. There's no shadow of a doubt that we

OBVIOUSLY THE SEASON'S BEEN TOUGH, IT'S REALLY PUSHED AND TESTED ALL OF US – AS IT SHOULD, REGARDLESS OF WHERE YOU'RE PLACED

believe that we can move the team forward and I think that starts from the culture that Vick creates. Amongst the staff, we all feel that way but you can also feel it amongst the players as well.

"It's been a really fascinating season. We've done pretty well against the top three teams and never been beaten by more than one goal against any of them. But you can see that we've struggled against some of the opponents that we probably should have been better against and I think that's the biggest thing that we can look forward to in this final stretch of the season. How do we mentally prep for those games and what can we do differently? We're always looking for ways in which we can be better so that will be our biggest focus."

Emma has enjoyed the collaborative approach of Jepson who works closely with all members of her staff which includes two other UEFA 'A'-licence coaches in Emma and goalkeeping coach Jen Herst.

"Vick values all of our opinions and our thoughts on the game," Emma explains. "We always reflect on and dissect the games together to make sure that we're all on the same page.

"If one of us has seen something that is different to how she has, we'll watch it back and see it all together. It's the same with what we see in opponents. Vick and I will always be across at least their last five games and all the key moments. She always has different eyes over the opposition to make sure that we're hitting the key things that we want to make sure our girls are prepared for. She's good at integrating the staff with that and making sure we're really clear on our game-plan. "

Emma has also enjoyed working on individual development with young players such as forwards Rinsola Babajide and Niamh Charles and midfielder Jade Bailey.

"I think it's a hard balance because you can make a lot of gains in pre-season or at times like international breaks where you are not just purely working towards the weekend and can get a bit more time out on the grass with individuals," she says.

"Players don't peak until they're 27 or 28 in the women's game so there's still a long way to go for a lot of this squad. Regardless of what age a player is you can always make them better. But when you have a younger team, I think you know that there's so much more in them but obviously with kids, they've still got so much to learn about the game.

"Rins' development has happened steadily. Some of it has just come with her maturing as a person and as a player as well. She seems to have really found that fascination for making herself better and the more she's asking the questions that she is, she has a really high ceiling.

"Niamh Charles has been coming back from injury and it's been a tough journey for her. She watches so much footage of her game and is super self-critical. She is always trying to be better and pushes herself

DERBY DATE

Liverpool FC Women's postponed Barclays FA Women's Super League fixture at Everton has been rescheduled for Wednesday 25 March (kick-off 7pm).

The match was originally due to have taken place last month but was called off due to adverse weather conditions caused by Storm Ciara.

The rearranged encounter will be the first WSL Merseyside derby to be hosted at Goodison Park and the second meeting of the two teams to be hosted at a first-team stadium this season after a derby-record crowd of 23,500 watched the first game at Anfield in November.

All tickets for the visitors' section of the ground will remain valid for the fixture.



on the grass like probably no-one else out there.

"Then we've seen Jade come along as well this season. When we saw the first game she played, we looked and thought there's a lot of potential there. I think she's started every game where she has been available for us. It's really good to see these young players develop."

Liverpool's goal-difference is significantly better than the four teams immediately above them in the table and Emma admits that could be important in the final analysis.

"Having two leaders at centre-half in our captain Soph [Bradley-Auckland] and vice-captain Niamh Fahey has been important," she says. "They have been a key reason why we haven't conceded that many goals. Our goal-difference versus the rest of the bottom-half right now is very good and I think that's huge credit to those two leading from the back.

"We're pretty aware of how important our goal difference could be and I think the other teams down there will be pretty aware of it as well. We lost 4-2 at West Ham last month and that was one of maybe only two or three games this season where we were disappointed with the performance as well as the result. But even at 4-0 down we clawed two goals back from Rachel Furness. "People may say we were never going to come back from 4-0 down but there's always a bigger picture. That we only lost the game by two goals rather than four could make a big difference in that sense. That could be a big deal at the end of the season and that's the type of standards you get from Furny."

The Reds return from a gap of almost a month when they play Manchester City on Sunday 22 March. They have eight games remaining and, of those, only two will be played outside the North-West with a re-arranged derby date at Goodison Park on Wednesday 25 Match also on the horizon.

"The break has probably come at a good time for us to refresh and re-energise the group," Emma says.

"We've got a really exciting run of games coming up,. We've got Man City at home and then Everton at Goodison which are exciting games in themselves and then we've got a streak of four home games in a row throughout April and early May so that spell is going to be pretty exciting for the group and for the staff."

Interview: William Hughes

KIWI CLAN: Liverpool FC Women's other New Zealanders

Sarah Gregorius: the forward was brought in by Matt Beard to bolster his squad for the second half of the club's inaugural FA WSL title-winning campaign of 2013. Capped 100 times by the Ferns, she currently plays in Japan with AS Elfen Saitama.

Rosie White: another to have won more than a century of international caps, Rosie was a popular member of the Reds' squad from July 2015 to November 2016 when she rejoined Matt Beard at Boston Breakers. She still plays in the United States today with Seattle Reign.

Aroon Clansey: a goalkeeper signed in 2012 from Canberra United. A Liverpool FC supporter, she was delighted to join the Reds and was named as the club's FA digital ambassador wearing the name of her Twitter handle on the sleeve of her shirt to help raise the profile of the league. Unfortunately, injuries restricted her to just three appearances and she later returned to Canberra to work as a video analyst.



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What's On

MAR/APR





HEADING INTO THE HOME STRAIGHT

The Reds will be aiming to take some giant steps towards silverware when they play three more Premier League games in the city this month.

Jürgen Klopp's men will close in on a first top-flight title in 30 years if they can beat Bournemouth at Anfield on Saturday 7 March, Everton at Goodison Park on Monday 16 March and Crystal Palace and Saturday 21 March.

If that happens, they could then have the chance of being crowned champions with victory at Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday 5 April. That picture would change, of course, should either the Reds or City lose points along the way.

On Wednesday 11 March, there is also the matter of the return leg of the Champions League round of 16 clash with Atletico Madrid. The Reds will be looking to overturn their single-goal first-leg deficit when Diego Simeone's side come to Anfield for the first time in almost a decade.

Should Liverpool progress, they will discover their future opponents in the draw for the quarter-finals and semi-finals that takes place in Nyon on Friday 20 March. The quarter-finals are likely to be played on 8 and 14 of April.

MAR/APR

What's On

MERSEYSIDE DERBY DUELS



It's not only the first-team who face a Merseyside derby this month. The Under-23s, Under-18s and Liverpool FC Women are also due to take on Everton during March.

The Under-23s make the trip to the Merseyrail Community Stadium in Southport for a Premier League 2 clash on Sunday 15 March (1pm), while Barry Lewtas' Under-18s host the Blues in a league fixture at Kirkby the previous day (11am).

With the first-team playing at Goodison on 16 March that makes it three all-Merseyside duels in as many days!

The glut of derbies will be completed when Vicky Jepson take the women's team to Goodison Park in a re-arranged Barclays FA Women's Super League game on Wednesday 25 March (7pm).

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...

94 years since Gordon Hodgson scored his first LFC goal on 10 March 1926

23 years since the second 4-3 win over Newcastle United on 10 March 1997

11 years since the Reds beat Real Madrid 4-0 in the Champions League on 10 March

43 years since the legendary 3-1 win against St-Etienne on 16 March 1977

39 years since goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar joined the Reds on 17 March 1981

24 years since the first 4-3 win over Newcastle United on 3 April 1996

15 years since Liverpool defeated Juventus 2-1 in the Champions League at Anfield on 5 April 2005

And it's eight years since Steven Gerrard's derby hat-trick at Anfield on 13 March 2012...

Steven Gerrard achieved plenty during his distinguished Liverpool career and he chose the occasion of his 400th senior appearance to tick another item off his 'to-do' list.

The Reds skipper grabbed himself a Merseyside derby hat-trick as Kenny Dalglish's side saw off Everton 3-0 in a Tuesday night clash at Anfield.

It was the first time Liverpool started a Premier League match with Luis Suarez, Andy Carroll and Gerrard and the combination worked well with Gerrard striking in the 34th, 51st and 90th minute.

His opener came after Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard blocked a shot from the overlapping Martin Kelly and the right-back's efforts to win back possession saw the ball run to Gerrard, who demonstrated superb technique to float a left-footed shot over Howard.

He struck again when Suarez eluded Sylvain Distin on the right but before he could let fly Gerrard stepped in to crash in a drive. He claimed the matchball in the closing seconds to the delight of the Kop with a simple finish from another Suarez assist.

Summarising Gerrard's performance afterwards, Dalglish said: "I am not educated enough to add to whatever anyone else has said about Steven. He's been fantastic for this football club. I left school at 15, my vocabulary is not that great. There is no way I could extol the virtues of Steven Gerrard and do him justice.

"Three goals tonight was fantastic reward for him, and the other three local lads we had didn't do too badly either."



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Andy Robertson 26 on 11 March

Danny Murphy 43 on 18 March

Fernando Torres 36 on 20 March

Nat Phillips 23 on 21 March

John Toshack 71 on 22 March

Harry Wilson 23 on 22 March



Jerzy Dudek 47 on 23 March

Gordon Milne 83 on 29 March

Rhian Brewster 20 on 1 April

Harvey Elliott 17 on 4 April

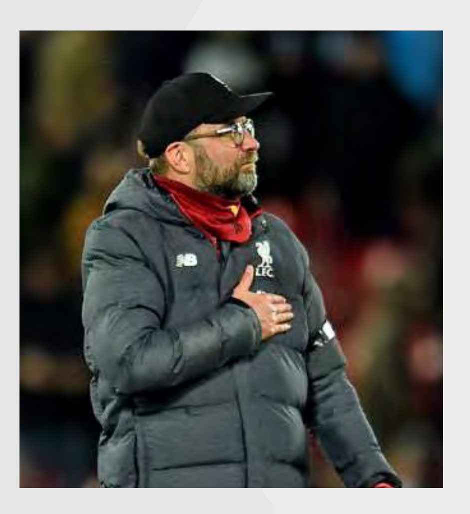
Nathaniel Clyne 29 on 5 April

Robbie Fowler 45 on 9 April



2019/20 Fixtures & Results

AUGUST		SCORE/KO	TV	SCORERS
Sun 04	Manchester City (CS, N)	1-1*	BT	Matip (pens: Shaqiri, Lallana, Chamberlain, Salah)
Fri 09	**Norwich City (H)**	**4-1**	**Sky**	**Hanley (OG), Salah, Van Dijk, Origi**
Wed 14	Chelsea (Super Cup, N)	2-2**	BT	Mane 2 (pens: Firmino, Fabinho, Origi, A-Arnold, Salah)
Sat 17	Southampton (A)	2-1		Mane, Firmino
Sat 24	**Arsenal (H)**	**3-1**	**Sky**	**Matip, Salah 2 (1 pen)**
Sat 31	Burnley (A)	3-0	Sky	Wood (OG), Mane, Firmino
SEPTEMBER				
Sat 14	**Newcastle United (H)**	**3-1**	**BT**	**Mane 2, Salah**
Tue 17	Napoli (UCL Matchday 1, A)	0-2	BT	
Sun 22	Chelsea (A)	2-1	Sky	Alexander-Arnold, Firmino
Wed 25	MK Dons (Carabao Cup 3, A)	2-0	Sky	Milner, Hoever
Sat 28	Sheffield United (A)	1-0	BT	Wijnaldum
OCTOBER				
Wed 02	**Salzburg (UCL Matchday 2, H)**	**4-3**	**BT**	**Mane, Robertson, Salah 2**
Sat 05	**Leicester City (H)**	**2-1**		**Mane, Milner (pen)**
Sun 20	Manchester United (A)	1-1	Sky	Lallana
Wed 23	Genk (UCL Matchday 3, A)	4-1	BT	Oxlade-Chamberlain 2, Mane, Salah
Sun 27	**Tottenham Hotspur (H)**	**2-1**	**Sky**	**Henderson, Salah (pen)**
Wed 30	Arsenal (Carabao Cup 4, H)	5-5**	Sky	Mustafi (OG), Milner (pen), Oxlade-Chamberlain, Origi 2 (pens: Milner, Lallana, Brewster, Origi, Jones)
NOVEMBER				
Sat 02	Aston Villa (A)	2-1		Robertson, Mane
Tue 05	**Genk (UCL Matchday 4, H)**	**2-1**	**BT**	**Wijnaldum, Oxlade-Chamberlain**
Sun 10	**Manchester City (H)**	**3-1**	**Sky**	**Fabinho, Salah, Mane**
Sat 23	Crystal Palace (A)	2-1		Mane, Firmino
Wed 27	**Napoli (UCL Matchday 5, H)**	**1-1**	**BT**	**Lovren**
Sat 30	**Brighton (H)**	**2-1**		**Van Dijk 2**
DECEMBER				
Wed 04	**Everton (H)**	**5-2**	**AP**	**Origi 2, Shaqiri, Mane, Wijnaldum**
Sat 07	Bournemouth (A)	3-0		Oxlade-Chamberlain, Keita, Salah
Tue 10	Salzburg (UCL Matchday 6, A)	2-0	BT	Keita, Mane, Salah
Sat 14	**Watford (H)**	**2-0**	**BT**	**Salah 2**
Tue 17	Aston Villa (Carabao Cup QF, A)	0-5	Sky	
Wed 18	Monterrey (CWC SF)	2-1	BBC	Keita, Firmino
Sat 21	Flamengo (CWF final)	1-0^	BBC	Firmino
Thu 26	Leicester City (A)	4-0	AP	Firmino 2, Milner (pen), Alexander-Arnold
Sun 29	**Wolverhampton W (H)**	**1-0**	**Sky**	**Mane**
JANUARY				
Thu 02	**Sheffield United (H)**	**2-0**	**BT**	**Salah, Mane**
Sun 05	Everton (FA Cup 3, H)	1-0	BBC	Jones
Sat 11	Tottenham Hotspur (A)	1-0	Sky	Firmino
Sun 19	**Manchester United (H)**	**2-0**	**Sky**	**Van Dijk, Salah**
Thu 23	Wolverhampton W (A)	2-1	BT	Henderson, Firmino
Sun 26	Shrewsbury Town (FA Cup 4, A)	2-2	BBC	Jones, Love (OG)
Wed 29	West Ham United (A)	2-0		Salah (pen), Oxlade-Chamberlain
FEBRUARY				
Sat 01	**Southampton (H)**	**4-0**		**Oxlade-Chamberlain, Henderson, Salah 2**
Tue 04	Shrewsbury Town (FA Cup 4Rep, H)	1-0		Williams (OG)
Sat 15	Norwich City (A)	1-0	Sky	Mane
Tue 18	Atletico Madrid (UCL R of 16 1)	0-1	BT	
Mon 24	**West Ham United (H)**	**3-2**	**Sky**	**Wijnaldum, Salah, Mane**
Sat 29	Watford (A)	0-3	Sky	
MARCH				
Tue 03	Chelsea (FA Cup 5, A)	0-2	BBC	
Sat 07	**Bournemouth (H)**	**12.30pm**	**BT**	
Wed 11	**Atletico Madrid (UCL R of 16 2)**	**8pm**	**BT**	
Mon 16	Everton (A)	8pm	Sky	
Sat 21	**Crystal Palace (H)**	**5.30pm**	**Sky**	
APRIL				
Sun 05	Manchester City (A)	4.30pm	Sky	
T/W 07/08	UCL QF 1	TBC	BT	
Sun 12	**Aston Villa (H)**	**4.30pm**	**Sky**	
T/W 14/15	UCL QF 2	TBC	BT	
Mon 20	Brighton (A)	8pm	Sky	
Sat 25	**Burnley (H)**	**12.30pm**	**BT**	
T/W 28/29	UCL SF 1	TBC	BT	
MAY				
Sat 02	Arsenal (A)	3pm		
T/W 05/06	UCL SF 2	TBC	BT	
Sat 09	**Chelsea (H)**	**3pm**		
Sun 17	Newcastle United (A)	3pm		
Sat 30	UCL final (N)	TBC	BT	



All fixtures subject to change. AP = Amazon Prime *lost 5-4 on pens ** won 5-4 on pens ^after extra-time



NEIL MELLOR

There's been too much talk about records as opposed to just how good this team is

Building a 22-point lead at the top of the Premier League is not only phenomenal – it's unheard-of. We've never seen a gap as big as the one Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool have built at the top before.

A couple of years ago, when Manchester City had their incredible run of 18 consecutive wins, people were saying they could be the greatest Premier League side ever. Yet when Liverpool matched that run, winning league 18 games in a row, people questioned if the Premier League was as strong. What does that tell you?

Nobody should underestimate just how successful this group of players have been this season.

It is very hard to win a Premier League game. It is very hard to win two or three Premier League games in a row. So to maintain a run of 18 wins, and beat every other opponent in the division, deserves huge credit for the players and management team at Liverpool Football Cub. They will be talked about as one of the greatest teams the Premier League has ever seen.

The stats show it. The records show it. And more records can still be broken. Those who say the Premier League is weaker are making easy excuses for teams that are underperforming.

Arsenal, Spurs, Chelsea, Man United. A lot of big clubs are underperforming and are using that excuse a little bit to explain it. For me, that shouldn't take anything away from what Liverpool have done. The Reds have been far too good for everybody and that is why their lead at the top is so substantial.

I was asked how big a shock to the system the 3-0 defeat at Watford would be to the players having won 26 and drawn one of their previous 27 league games. I'd love to say I know! I don't know, and nor does anybody else, because it's never happened before.

This group of players are unique. They've gone on a run that has broken all kinds of records, but perhaps there was an element of relief – a sense of freedom – when they lost at Vicarage Road.

Jürgen mentioned it afterwards. Every game they were being told 'you've got this record, you've broken that record'. As good as that is, it felt like there was too much talk about records as opposed to just how good this team is and what they are about to achieve.

The away-defeats against Atletico Madrid in the Champions League and Chelsea in the FA Cup have led to questions about a drop in performance levels after the winter-break. It's a natural thing that a break can disrupt the rhythm of a team that plays the way Liverpool do, but I also think the players needed that break to mentally recharge their batteries.

Every team goes through a dip in form during a season, it's almost impossible not to. If Liverpool lose four or five Premier League games then it would be a concern, although even then they'd still have a lead at the top.

This group of players showed their mental strength in the Champions League last season having come so close to winning it the year before. We've seen their hunger to achieve in the Premier League this year and it is a matter of time before they become champions.

They just need to keep doing what they've been doing. Maintain their focus, stay mentally strong, think about the games they've come back in and won. Do that and they'll get the job done.

Ultimately the aim this season was to win the Premier League and that is going to happen. So enjoy it. There was a lot of appreciation shown by the Anfield crowd after the final home game against Wolves last season when Liverpool hadn't won the league. Whoever is lucky enough to be at Anfield for the Chelsea game in May is going to enjoy it even more.

Rarely can you enjoy the team you follow being in the form Liverpool have been in this season. You have to enjoy these times as we all know things can change quickly.

When Jürgen Klopp came in Liverpool were struggling to finish in the top four of the Premier League. Now we're on the verge of winning it.



• Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33

FURON



GOAL BOUND

























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